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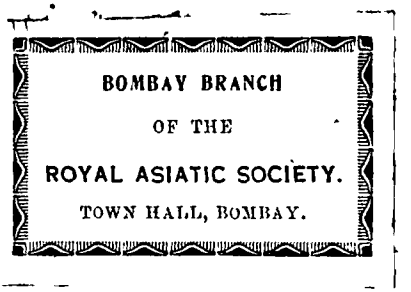

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NOTES FROM BOOKS.

IN

FOUR ESSAYS.

44969

BY

HENRY TAYLOR.

AUTHOR OF "NOTES FROM LIFE," "PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE," ETC.

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PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH I have always intended to reprint those few writings of mine in periodical works, which are not necessarily and by the nature of the subjects ephemeral, I should not have chosen for the republication this time of political excitement, were it not that there is to be found in one of these Essays—the second of the series—an exposition of the views taken by our greatest Poets of the nature of liberty; which exposition, if it justly represent those views, will not be unaptly put forward for present consideration. Our great Poets have been, perhaps, our best political philosophers; and if the reading and study of poetry be put aside by political commotions,

it is because men lack time to be studious, or because the temper of their minds is rendered averse from contemplation, not because our poetry is wanting in applicability to such seasons; for unless I err greatly through partiality and partial knowledge, the poetry of this country (a country pre-eminently poetical), is its chief storehouse of civil wisdom; whilst it is in that other country whose poetry has ever been of an inferior order and beyond its own territories in the least estimation, that political wisdom has been most at fault, supplanted from time to time by the crudest theories and the most barbarous practice—in so much that despite the scientific attainments, the many dexterities and the colloquial cleverness of that people, any instructed man who should adventure to visit them at this time, might suppose himself, like the suitor in Beaumont and Fletcher's Play, "arrived amongst a nation

of new-found fools, on a land where no navigator had yet planted wit." Such would be the appearance; and though in reality there is no such thing as a nation of fools, yet there is unhappily a nation in which at particular conjunctures, and (let us hope) only for a season, the fools are so much the most active and energetic as to be the only parties apparent, and through defect of sober intrepidity on the part of those who are rational, foolhardihood is triumphant.

"The Good want power, but to weep barren tears.
The Powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
The Wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
And all best things are thus confused to ill." *

I do not mean of course to imply that it is for want of written poetry that the French nation cannot see it's way; nor that it is by virtue of written poetry that our way lies more in the light: but out of that imagi-

* Shelley. "Prometheus Unbound."

native power in our national mind which is wanting in their's, have proceeded the twin-births of poetry and political wisdom; and as they are born of one stock, so do they dwell together in the land in a faithful and helpful relationship.

If the poet who is now one of the foremost members of that body in France which is called its Government, and who is apparently one of the least erring, certainly the most brave and generous of their number,—if that in some respects very admirable person be not politically wise, the inference should be, not that poets make bad politicians, but rather that this politician is but an indifferent poet. For true greatness in poetry there is none without wisdom,—without that wisdom at least which errs not widely in the philosophy of politics, whether or not it be competent to the conduct of affairs. The great English Poets, though ardent lovers of freedom, have never, as far as

I know, lent their countenance in a single line to the confounding of liberty with equality; nor was it possible that they should do so, so long as the poetic faculty was alive in them: for in what is that faculty most essentially exercised but in the inquisition into Nature, and who can look into Nature and fail to see that the system of God's Providence therein is not a system of equality, but throughout its whole scope and tenour a system of subordination?

> "Not equal all, yet free;
> Equally free; for orders and degrees
> Jar not with liberty, but well consist."*

Such was the judgment of the least conservative of our great Poets as delivered in verse; and the prose development of his opinions may be found in his second book "Of Reformation in England."

In Spenser's allegory the champion of

* Paradise Lost, b. v., 791.

equality is represented as a Giant full of violence, pride, and presumption, who proclaimed that all realms and nations were run awry, and undertook to repair them by reducing all things to a level:

> "Therefore the Vulgar did about him flock
> And cluster thick unto his leesings vain,
> Like foolish flies about an honey-crock,
> In hope by him great benefit to gain."

He is rebuked by Arthegal as seeking to contravene the order of Nature and Providence, and also for his blindness in aiming at equality through mere physical distribution, having, at the same time, no balance in which he can weigh what is moral, spiritual, or intellectual. But he stubbornly maintains his ground:

> "'Thou foolish Elf,' said then the Giant wroth,
> 'Seest not how badly all things present be,
> And each Estate quite out of order go'th?
> The Sea itself dost thou not plainly see
> Encroach upon the Land there under thee;
> And th' Earth itself how daily 'tis increased
> By all that dying to it turned be?

Were it not good that wrong were then surceased,
And from the most that some were given to the least?

'Therefore I will throw down these mountains high,
And make them level with the lowly plain:
These towering rocks which reach unto the sky
I will thrust down into the deepest main,
And as they were them equalise again.
Tyrants that make men subject to their law,
I will suppress, that they no more may reign;
And Lordings curb that Commons overawe,
And all the wealth of rich men to the poor will draw.'

'Of things unseen how canst thou deem aright,'
Then answered the righteous Arthegal,
'Sith thou misdeem'st so much of things in sight?
What though the Sea with waves continual
Do eat the Earth, it is no more at all;
Ne is the Earth the less or loseth aught;
For whatsover from one place doth fall,
Is with the tide unto another brought:
For there is nothing lost but may be found if sought.

* * * * *

'For take thy balance (if thou be so wise)
And weigh the wind that under Heaven doth blow;
Or weigh the light that in the East doth rise;
Or weigh the thought that from Man's mind doth flow:
But if the weight of these thou canst not show,
Weigh but one word that from thy lips doth fall.
For how canst thou those greater secrets know
That dost not know the least thing of them all.
Ill can he rule the Great that cannot reach the Small.'"

The argument proceeds, not without the help of Talus, the faithful attendant of Arthegal; but the Giant is obstinate in error:

"Whom when so lewdly-minded Talus found,
Approaching nigh unto him, cheek by cheek,
He shouldered him from off the higher ground,
And down the rock him throwing, in the sea him drowned."

That portion of Spenser's argument which points to the restorative and compensatory character of apparent deprivations in the physical scheme of Nature, in order to be recognised as just in politics, should have been, perhaps, more distinctly connected with that other portion of his argument which insists upon the importance, in the lot of Man, of those elements which are not told by number, weight, or measure; showing that equality of wealth does not produce equality of weal, and that Justice is concerned, not in making men equal, but in making them as much as may be, equally the arbiters and agents of their own happiness and fortunes. There is

but this step wanting, however, to bring the opponents "cheek by cheek," and the Giant is fairly shouldered from the higher ground.

If Spenser and Milton, each in his way, the one copiously, the other succinctly, propounded the principles by which liberty and justice are distinguished from equality, Shakespeare, whose political philosophy was far-sighted in proportion to the light which his imagination cast upon all he saw, might almost be supposed, from a speech given to Ulysses in "Troilus and Cressida," to have descried in prophetic vision those consequences of the doctrines of equality which, at the end of the last century, were exemplified in France.

"How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commérce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark! what discord follows! Each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters

Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be Lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be Right; or rather, Right and Wrong,
(Between whose endless jar Justice resides,)
Should lose their names, and so should Justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite a universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce a universal prey,
And, last, eat up himself."*

In the progress of such a principle Ulysses beheld plagues, portents, and mutiny,

"frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of States
Quite from their fixture."

That Shakespeare, living in a peaceful age, under a monarchy yet unshaken, should have traced with such curious precision the hypothetic results of the false philosophy which was to be long after exemplified in France; and

* Troilus and Cressida, Act i., Scene 3.

that France in little more than sixty years after her first Revolution, should be brought again within the danger of these consequences, may serve to show how much we may learn from the imaginative reason without experience; and where the reason is not imaginative, how soon the lessons of experience are forgotten. In this country, where the imaginative character of the national intellect deepens and widens its contemplations, and retards its conclusions,—for the imagination is a self-questioning faculty,—I trust it is superfluous to insist upon the truth that liberty has no interest in equality. In France, where, with great activity of the other faculties, the popular imagination is small, weak, and at the same time, highly excitable,—for, in the mind as in the body, inflammatory action proceeds as often from weakness as from fullness,—it is a truth which the very elect of the instructed classes have shown themselves unable to discern.

But if the English people be safe from the grosser delusions which are now prevalent in France, they have, nevertheless, much to learn as to the moral and spiritual nature of liberty, and the impossibility of pushing it on by merely political impulses. This they will best learn from those by whom liberty is best loved; and there are no sources from which the love of liberty flows more freely than from the minds of the great Poets of England.

MORTLAKE,

1*st May*, 1848.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE POETICAL WORKS OF MR. WORDSWORTH	1
MR. WORDSWORTH'S SONNETS	91
MR. DE VERE'S POEMS	187
THE WAYS OF THE RICH AND GREAT	234

ADVERTISEMENT.

[The publication of this Volume having been delayed fo some months after it was printed, it will be necessary t have reference to the date of the Preface (1st May, 1848) in order to understand allusions there made to events the passing.]

LONDON,
5th Dec. 1848.

ESSAYS.

THE

POETICAL WORKS OF MR. WORDSWORTH.*

Mr. Wordsworth's prefatory theories have been for many years sufficiently vexed and controverted; and the time seems to have come when, if we are to pause at all upon this threshold of his works, it should be with a view rather to a statement of the results than to a continuance of the disputation. In point of opinion the result has been, we should say, as to the matter of poetic diction, a very general admission that no real elevation can be given to poetry by the use of phrases which are no otherwise poetical than as not being

* A Critical Essay, reprinted from No. 104 of the 'Quarterly Review,' being that for the Month of November, 1834.

met with in prose. In point of practice, the result might have been equally decided, if certain results of a different character had not been thrown up at the same time from other sources. Some reforms have been effected however. The poetical vocabulary in use precedently to Mr. Wordsworth's prefaces has been expurgated; Poetry is, in some particulars, more plain-spoken than she was then used to be; and some things are now called by their right names which were then considered to be more favourably presented to the poetical reader under any other denominations than those which belong to them in the language of real life. Thus the bird commonly known by the name of the nightingale is now so called in poetry; whereas before Mr. Wordsworth's time no poet could be content to give it an appellation less poetical than 'Philomel,' or 'tuneful bird of night;' and the luminary which was formerly graced with some such titular distinction as 'Bright Phœbus,' or 'Apollo's golden fire,' is now to be met with in a volume of poetry under the same

name as that which is given to it in the almanac.

So far the prefaces did their work; but hardly was it accomplished, when there sprang up a new growth of abuses; and whilst some of these bore a very close resemblance to their predecessors, others, though having their root in the same soil, tended more dangerously to the corruption of style, inasmuch as they were of a more covert and surreptitious nature. A bald misnomer like that of 'Philomel' or 'Bulbul,' 'Albion' or 'Erin,' is sure to be shortly weeded out of the language to which it does not belong; but there are ways at the present time of falsifying genuine English words for purposes supposed to be poetical, which are more insidious, inasmuch as they carry with them not merely a confusion of tongues, but a confusion of ideas; and often also, by really conveying a sentiment, give some colour to their pretext of conveying a sense.

If we look through some volume of current poetry for one of those words which seem to

be considered eminently poetical at the present day—the adjective 'wild' for example—and consider it closely in the many situations in which it will be found to recur, we shall in general find it to be used, not for the sake of any meaning, definite or indefinite, which it can be supposed legitimately to bear, but—in a manner which Mr. Wordsworth's prefaces will be found to explain—for the sake of conjuring up certain associations somewhat casually connected with it. It has been originally, perhaps, employed with propriety and with distinguished success, in some passages conceived in the same mood of mind and pointed to the same effects which are aimed at by its subsequent employers; the word takes, as it were, the colour of these original passages; becomes a stock-word with those who have more of the feeling of poetry than of discrimination in the use of language, and is employed thenceforward with a progressively diminishing concern for its intrinsic significancy, or for the propriety of the applications which are made of it. The adjectives

bright, dark, lonely, the nouns *light, dream, halo,* and fifty other words, might be instanced, which are scattered almost at random through our fugitive poetry, with a sort of feeling senselessness, and convey to the congenial reader the sentiment of which they are understood to be the symbols, without either suggesting to him any meaning, or awakening him to the want of it. In some instances it does not seem to be necessary that the word should be otherwise than misplaced, even in the passage which may have first given the impulse which led to the indiscriminate use of it. 'The mind, the music *breathing* from her face,' is suggestive of as much false metaphor as could well be concentrated in a single line; but it conveyed some vague impressions of beauty and fervour, and was associated with the feelings with which Lord Byron's writings were usually read; and 'to breathe' became thenceforth, amongst the followers of Lord Byron, a verb poetical which meant anything but respiration. Indeed the abuse seems to have spread to a circle which might be

supposed to be remote from Lord Byron's influence; for a book was published two or three years ago with the title of '*Holy* Breathings.'

These errors, when they shall have become old and tiresome, will probably give way, like those which preceded them, on the one hand to more fresh and fashionable faults, and on the other to a renewed application of Mr. Wordsworth's principles of poetic diction. Natural good sense and good taste will always conquer at last, though they will never be in want of new worlds of error to oppugn; and upon the sense and taste of the natural human understanding Mr. Wordsworth's principles will be found to rest, if they be accepted with the modifications which may be considered to have fairly resulted from the discussion that they have undergone. So accepted, they would teach the poet, not to draw his language exclusively from that of common life, nor indeed to reject, from some kinds of poetry, language of a highly scholastic and composite structure; but in general to use the same language which is employed in the writings and conversations

of other men when they write and discourse their best—to avoid any words which are not admissible in good prose or unaffected conversation, whether erudite or ordinary—and especially to avoid the employment of any words in a sense which is not their legitimate prosaic sense. The more these rules are observed, the more benefit will accrue to the writers and readers of poems: at least to those writers who can afford to deal in clear ideas, and to those readers who have so far exercised their faculties as to be desirous to understand a meaning in poetry.

If the influence of Mr. Wordsworth's works has (as we believe it has) added largely to the number of those who cultivate poetry with this aim, it is saying nothing in derogation of what he has done for his art—more than must be said of the greatest artists that ever existed —to acknowledge that the generation of false tastes and foolish phraseologies proceeds *pari passu* with their destruction, and that Mr. Wordsworth has not, any more than any poet ever did before, cut off the succession of

readers who are capable of receiving, through catch-words appealing to their poetical susceptibilities, a pleasure which would be dissipated if any demand were made upon their understandings.

'Ut sylvæ foliis pronos mutantur in annos'—

If the true tastes of mankind are permanent and the false deciduous, there are nevertheless those elements of false taste permanently inherent in human nature, which will perpetuate the kind and quality of bad poetry, however speedy may be the oblivion of the successive products. Let Mr. Wordsworth, or

'Let Hercules himself do what he may,'

poetry always will have, no doubt, as it always has had, its meretricious professors, its vicious admirers, and its bastard language.

Perhaps, however, the progress of Mr. Wordsworth's principles has been more aided by his poems than by his prefaces—by his practice than by his theory; for whilst the consideration of the latter is still we believe confined to disciples and students, the poems

have made a rapid advance to popularity, more especially in the last ten years. A marked change may be observed in the tone taken upon the subject by those who float upon the current of society and make themselves the mouth-piece of its opinions. We recollect the time when the mention of Mr. Wordsworth's name would have been met by any one of these gentlemen with some excellent joke about Peter Bell or the Idiot Boy: but of these pleasantries mankind has by degrees grown weary; and there are few societies in which they would not now be received as denoting that the party from whom they proceeded was somewhat behind the world in these matters.

We cannot but think that it is in a great measure Mr. Wordsworth's own fault that he has been thus late in winning the ear of the people at large. He knowingly and wantonly laid himself open to ridicule at a period when criticism was infected by a spirit of sarcasm which, ignorant and shallow as it was, was not ill calculated to please the popular

appetite, was attended therefore with eminent success, and brought a blight as of a poisonous insect upon the growth of everything that was great and noble. Criticism and poetry, which ought to flourish together as members of the same family of art, were then hardly ever in friendly relations with each other: the former, on the contrary, growing beside the latter like a mildewed ear, 'blasting its wholesome brother.' At this period, Mr. Wordsworth, challenging and defying, as it were, the evil spirit which was abroad, persisted in throwing out, from time to time, effusions which he must have known to be the very matter which that spirit would most delight to fasten upon and could turn to the best account. He seemed to brave the contempt of the children of this world, and to take a pleasure in provoking the scoffs of their blind guides, as one who was resolved that his followers should be a peculiar people.

We know not why this should have been done, or what was the compensation which it brought for the disadvantage, which it must

unquestionably be esteemed by any poet, to have his influence—in this instance, it may be said, his purifying, fertilizing, and exalting influence—so long checked and retarded; thereby rendering him, though not ultimately less illustrious, yet certainly less useful in his day and generation.

If we are called upon, as no doubt we shall be by some of Mr. Wordsworth's more enthusiastic disciples, to specify in what instances Mr. Wordsworth did wantonly expose himself to injury from the buffoons of criticism, we answer—that with all the reverence which we entertain for Mr. Wordsworth as the greatest poet and philosopher of his age, we shall not decline any unacceptable office which a spirit of free inquiry shall seem to impose. We quote, therefore, the commonly quoted instance of the 'Idiot Boy;' and we allege that the announcement of a serious moral purpose in this poem, namely, that of 'tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings,' and the choice of the incidents through which this purpose was to be accom-

plished, namely, the illness of Susan Gale—Betty Foy's difficulty in finding any one to go for the doctor—her determination to send her son the idiot upon a pony—his losing himself on the way—Betty's distressful search for him and ultimate success;—we allege, that this end could not be announced and these means employed, without producing such a sense of contrast as must of necessity suggest ludicrous ideas, and favour the attempt to direct upon the author the sentiment of ridicule so provoked. Human ingenuity cannot invent that amalgam of the trivial and the grave, of the imaginative and the familiar, which should succeed in giving congruity of effect to such a narrative, seriously related and set forth with the details which Mr. Wordsworth has not omitted to delineate. Will it be said, then, that the relation is meant to be comic?—a comic narrative, merely adumbrating such matter of serious thought as all truth is pregnant with, when regarded with a philosophic mind? But if the poem is to be so considered, then the comic effect, resulting as it does

chiefly from the narration in verse of matters of fact which when there introduced appear ridiculously insignificant, must be said to be wanting in vivacity, unity, and predominance. Passages of poetic beauty occur,* and appear to demand of the reader that he should regard the whole as a serious performance, and there is no such decided and unmixed drollery as might dissipate his perplexity, and assure him that it was the poet's intention to excite his merriment.

The faults of which we cite the 'Idiot Boy' as exhibiting an example, are in our opinion attributable also, in a more or less degree, to several others of Mr. Wordsworth's

* Take for instance the following :—

'By this the stars were almost gone,
The moon was setting on the hill,
So pale you scarcely looked at her:
The little birds began to stir,
Though yet their tongues were still.'

Poets have always delighted in describing times by their incidents; and 'The Hours' have each received, from poet or painter, or both in one, their characteristic garb and emblem: but we hardly know of any passage in which the poetical faculty is made thus delicately, and as it were with a minute-pointer, to indicate the time of day.

earlier minor poems, and to portions of 'Peter Bell.' As experiments, or as intellectual freaks or vagaries, there was no reason why he should not have written these poems, except that, as we have said above, they afforded to the clowns and harlequins of criticism an opportunity of 'setting on a certain quantity of barren spectators to laugh.' But, bearing in mind that this was sure to be the result, and that this result was calculated to repress the admiration which must otherwise have been rendered to his works at large, we cannot but think that he would have done well to temper with more of worldly discretion, in these in our view intrinsically unimportant particulars, the independent exercise of his genius.

There are some other particulars in which we concur in the censures which have been passed upon several of Mr. Wordsworth's earlier poems. His theory of poetic diction was perhaps urged further in practice than it would have been, had it not been a sort of theory militant—a theory which had to

prevail against popular error in the opposite extreme, and to establish itself in spite of the hostility of critics. He was perhaps more afraid than was needful of indulging in the weakness of concession.

'I am sensible,' he says in the preface to the second edition of the Lyrical Ballads, 'that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general; and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, sometimes from diseased impulses, I may have written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. Hence I have no doubt that, in some instances, feelings, even of the ludicrous, may be given to my readers by expressions which appeared to me tender and pathetic. Such faulty expressions, were I convinced they were faulty at present, and that they must necessarily continue to be so, I would willingly take all reasonable pains to correct. But it is dangerous to make these alterations on the simple authority of a few individuals, or even of certain classes of men; for where the understanding of an author is not convinced, or his feelings altered, this cannot be done without great injury to himself: for his own feelings are his stay and support; and if he sets them aside in one instance, he may be induced to repeat this act till his mind loses all confidence in itself, and becomes utterly debilitated.'

We scarcely think that Mr. Wordsworth's

mind, deeply founded as it was by nature, could have run any risk of this kind from a more ready compliance with public tastes, on points which were material no otherwise than in the unfortunate particular of leading to conflicts. Whether from the impulse of this unyielding *antagonism*, or from giving too much way to thought and theory in the choice of his phraseology and thus losing the guidance of natural impressions, he was frequently, we think, betrayed into the use, in serious poetry, of language not only plain but colloquial; of phrases not only divested of adventitious associations of the poetical kind, but charged with opposite associations; and his style, in certain portions of his earlier writings, lay open to the objection, that whereas the end it had in view was a perfect simplicity of effect, it did not in point of fact accomplish that object, nor appear to the majority of readers to be the style which it was natural for an educated writer to use, whose chief care was to convey his meaning distinctly. It is always to be borne in mind

that simplicity in poetry is the result of art, and that the *ars celare artem* is peculiarly requisite to this grace of style. In some of Mr. Wordsworth's earlier poems, the art employed to this end was consummate; in others, it was, we venture to think, apparent.

We will here present our readers with an example in each kind. The following stanzas appear to us to betray the devices by which the effect of simplicity is sought to be obtained:—

'Beneath the clear blue sky, he saw
A little field of meadow ground;
But field or meadow name it not;
Call it of earth a small green plot,
With rocks encompassed round.

The Swale flowed under the grey rocks,
But he flowed quiet and unseen;—
You need a strong and stormy gale
To bring the noises of the Swale
To that green spot, so calm and green!'

In those which we are next to extract, on the contrary, it appears to us that art—occult art—could not be more successfully exercised in simplifying the language of poetry. An

old man, of a mirthful temperament, is lying with the poet, on a summer's day, by the side of a fountain, and replies to a request that he would sing one of his lively songs, in a strain of transitory sadness, such as is often evoked by a summons to be gay:—

'Down to the vale this water steers—
How merrily it goes!
'Twill murmur on a thousand years,
And flow as now it flows.

And here, on this delightful day,
I cannot chuse but think
How oft, a vigorous man, I lay
Beside this fountain's brink.

My eyes are dim with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
For the same sound is in my ears
Which in those days I heard.

Thus fares it still in our decay,
And yet the wiser mind
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind.

The blackbird in the summer trees,
The lark upon the hill,
Let loose their carols when they please,
Are quiet when they will.

With nature never do they wage
A foolish strife; they see
A happy youth, and their old age
Is beautiful and free:

But we are pressed by heavy laws;
And often glad no more,
We wear a face of joy, because
We have been glad of yore.

If there be one who need bemoan
His kindred laid in earth,
The household hearts that were his own,
It is the man of mirth.'

To language so exquisitely simple as this, so graceful, so thoughtful, we doubt if the corrupted taste of any age, however dazzled with false adornments, could refuse admiration; and if the simplicity of all Mr. Wordsworth's earlier poems had been neither more nor less than this, his works would probably have been as popular from the first as they have lately begun to be. Yet how few, comparatively, of his now voluminous works are those from which many thoughtless persons have been used to infer the character of the whole; and how genuine is the simplicity of

style in nine-tenths of his writings, in all that he has written subsequently to the period of his earlier and more theoretic taste! In truth, those who refer to the 'Idiot Boy,' as a characteristic specimen of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, after having really read his works, might be equally expected, after reading those of Lord Bacon, to quote, as characteristic of that great man's philosophy, the portion of his medical writings in which he recommends, as good for the digestion, 'whelps and healthy young boys applied to the stomach.' Few or none are the minds of great activity which are not subject to these occasional aberrations and lapses.

Idle misapprehensions of this kind are not the only ones which have retarded Mr. Wordsworth's popularity. Readers of a very different class from those who fell into these errors—able men and laborious students—have been accustomed to deliver it as their opinion, that Mr. Wordsworth is more eminently a great *thinker* than a great poet; and the belief has been disseminated that it is

necessary to climb to the heights of a new system of philosophy, in order to reach an appreciation of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry and find a pleasure in it. It appears to us that those from whom this opinion has taken its rise, are men who, from the nature of their studies and the bent of their minds, apprehend more readily what is intellectual than what is poetical, and see all that there is of thought in what they read, and not all that there is of poetry. Undoubtedly Mr. Wordsworth is a philosopher; but those who are repelled from his writings by this consideration must need to have it explained to them in what sense he is so; and one or two of our pages may not be misemployed in the endeavour to afford them this explanation.

Mr. Wordsworth then, in our estimation, is a philosophic writer in the sense in which any man must be so, who writes from the impulses of a capacious and powerful mind, habituated to observe, to analyse, and to generalise. So far forth was Shakspeare likewise a philosopher. But it does not

follow from this that he should be supposed to have invented any peculiar ethical or metaphysical system, or to have discovered any new principles upon which such a system could be built. What is new and peculiar in him as a philosophic thinker, is not his view of the primary principles of psychological philosophy, nor the trains of ratiocination by which he descends to those which are secondary and derivative: it consists not so much in reasoning as in judgment; not so much in the exposition of abstract truths, as in his manner of regarding the particulars of life as they arise, and of generalising them into one truth or another, according as the one or the other harmonises with his moral temperament and habitual and cherished states of feeling.

If a poet have any peculiar philosophy of his own, it must be mainly through this modification of the judgment by individual temperament; the affinities of such temperament drawing round him and giving predominant influence to some truths, whilst

others are merely not rejected in deference to the reason. Nor is it to be supposed that a judgment so modified, and a philosophy into which sensibility thus enters, are therefore fallacious. Such a supposition will be entertained, we are aware, by those who have imagined to themselves such a mere fiction as the contemporaneous discernment of all moral truth. The real state of the case being, however, that truth can only be shown piecemeal in its component parts, and that poetry, at all events, can do no more than cast partial lights upon it, it is saying nothing in derogation of any man's philosophy, still less of his poetical philosophy, to affirm, that in so far as it is peculiar to himself, it is so by dealing with that portion of truth of which his temperament gives him the most lively consciousness. By his individual temperament it is that Mr. Wordsworth's philosophic perceptions of truth, various and composite as they are, come to have a certain unity of drift, which has given to his writings the character of embodying a peculiar system of

philosophy. We shall best explain our view of what that philosophy is, by a commentary upon some of the passages in which it comes to light.

The lines left upon a yew-tree seat, after describing the life of mortification led by a neglected man of genius—

> 'Who with the food of pride sustained his soul
> In solitude'—

conclude with the following moral:—

> 'If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
> Of young imagination have kept pure,
> Stranger! henceforth be warned; and know that pride,
> Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
> Is littleness; that he who feels contempt
> For any living thing, hath faculties
> Which he has never used; that thought with him
> Is in its infancy. The man whose eye
> Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
> The least of Nature's works, one who might move
> The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
> Unlawful ever. Oh be wiser, thou!
> Instructed that true knowledge leads to love,
> True dignity abides with him alone
> Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
> Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
> In lowliness of heart.'

Let the stranger who is addressed in this

passage be supposed to be another Wordsworth, another philosophic poet, or rather a pupil apt for becoming such, and then the injunctions which it contains are admirably calculated to train him in the way that *he* should go, although it may be possible to represent them as requiring to be received with some qualification by others. The nature of these qualifications will present a key to some of the peculiarities of Mr. Wordsworth's moral views. We are told that

> 'He who feels contempt
> For any living thing, hath faculties
> That he has never used; that thought with him
> Is in its infancy.'

Were we to understand the doctrine as delivered for acceptation by mankind at large, we should take some exceptions. The moral government of the world appears to us to require that in the every-day intercourse of ordinary man with man, room should be given to the operation of the harsher sentiments of our nature—anger, resentment, contempt. They were planted in us for a

purpose, and are not essentially and necessarily wrong in themselves, although they may easily be wrong in their direction. What we have to do is not to eradicate and abolish such feelings; and we are to subdue, tame, and control them, not with a view to their suppression, but only with a view to their just application. Let the sentiment of justice be paramount, and it will lead to such serious consideration of the grounds of our hostile feelings as will, in itself and of necessity, temper them; but neither need nor ought to extinguish them, nor even to abate their vivacity further than is necessary to admit of clear perceptions and a just judgment of their objects. Anger, resentment, and contempt, are instruments of the penal law of nature and private society, which, as long as evil exists, must require to be administered; and the best interests of mankind demand that they should be tempered with justice much more than with mercy. The public laws of a community, and the penalties they denounce, have their chief

importance by giving countenance and operation to the private penalties of society, the judgments of the street and the market-place, searching and pervasive, by which alone evil inchoate can be contended with and destroyed. That man, so far as he is liable to evil inclinations, should fear his neighbour, is as requisite for the good of society as that he should love his neighbour; and that which he will commonly stand most in fear of is his neighbour's just contempt.

Do we then, in so far as the doctrine in question is concerned, attribute to Mr. Wordsworth a *false* philosophy? We are by no means so presumptuous, nor (let us hope) so incapable of comprehending Mr. Wordsworth's views. In the first place, we conceive that Mr. Wordsworth adverted more especially to that species of contempt which is immediately connected with the pride denounced previously in the same passage, and the self-love denounced subsequently—the undue contempt which a man conjures up in himself through the workings of self-love,

for the ends of self-aggrandisement, or perhaps more frequently to stave off a feeling of humiliation and self-reproach. But without insisting upon a qualification which the language employed may seem to some to refuse, we find in the proposition, taken even in all the absoluteness of its terms, no error, but, we should say, a peculiarity of sentiment, proceeding from a rare constitution of mind, adapted to that constitution, and when enjoined upon men whose minds are similarly constituted, not enjoined amiss.

The same sentiments are not to be cultivated by all sorts of minds. The standard of right and wrong is not so ill adapted to human nature as to take no account of its idiosyncracies, and to make all dispositions equally right or wrong in every frame and fabric of mind in which they are to be found throughout the infinite varieties of moral structure. There are men who are made to do more good by their just antipathies than by their sympathies, as there are others whose just sympathies are more available than

their antipathies. There are also men whose admirable gifts of contemplation, whose clear intellectual insights, whose singular powers of communicating charitable thoughts, would be in part obscured and defeated by the admission of feelings alien to *their* natures, however necessary and wholesome as ordinary elements in the great compound of human society. These men are chosen instruments, and it is for them so to order their being as shall best conduce to the development and unimpeded operation of their excellent gifts. They should therefore take into their hands the lyre alone, leaving in the hands of others, with due acknowledgment, nevertheless, of their use and necessity, the sword, the axe, and the halter. Accordingly, to whom is it that Mr. Wordsworth addresses his admonition?—

> 'If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
> Of young imagination have kept pure—'

It is one thus eminently endowed—one whose gift of imagination has filled his mind with pure and holy forms—that Mr. Wordsworth adjures to profit by this gift to its

fullest extent, to cultivate the knowledge which leads to love, and not to desecrate *his* heart by the admission of a contemptuous feeling, even in respect of objects which may be not unworthily visited with contempt by others. *He,* searching for the explication of all that happens, and understanding through what impulses of nature or temptations of circumstance one man or another comes to be weak and vile; regarding all human acts or characters as natural phenomena, the materials of induction, and giving his mind duly in his vocation to the search for final causes and the working out of abstract results—he, we say, the sage thus commissioned, must, for the purposes of this his comprehensive survey, look down upon human nature from an eminence, and strive to raise himself above the influence of all vehement and disturbing passions. Even such of them as may work for good with men not absolved by the exercise of higher functions from taking a part in the practical contests of life, must be regarded as of too

temporal and secular a character to be entertained by him.

Closely connected with his repudiation of the harsher and more violent feelings of humankind, is Mr. Wordsworth's devotion to the beauty of the forms of external nature. This devotion affords to men of great excitability and a passionate sense of the beautiful, an escape from many dangers and disturbances. The appetite for the beautiful in such men *must* be fed, and human beauty is a diet which leads to excessive stimulation, frequent vicissitudes of feeling at all events, and in every probability, to the excitement of bitter and turbulent passions. The love and admiration of nature leads *from* all these; being in truth the safe outlet for every excess of sensibility. The pleasure so derived appears to be, of all human pleasures, the most exempt from correlative pain. It has no connexion of its own creating with any intemperance, sensual, sentimental, or intellectual. Moreover, he who has given away his heart to the beauty of nature rests in the

quiet consciousness that his admiration is fixed upon a perdurable object; and, redeemed from that sense of the transitory which so often mixes perturbation with pleasure, there is perhaps no feeling of the human heart which, being so intense, is at the same time so composed as that to which admiration of the external forms of nature gives birth. It is for this reason, amongst others, that it is peculiarly favourable to the contemplations of a poetical philosopher, and eminently so to one like Mr. Wordsworth, in whose scheme of thought there is no feature more prominent than the doctrine that the intellect should be nourished by the feelings, and that the state of mind which bestows a 'gift of genuine insight' is one of profound emotion as well as profound composure.

The power which lies in the beauty of nature to induce this union of the tranquil and the vivid is described, and to every disciple of Mr. Wordsworth has been as much as is possible imparted, by the celebrated 'Lines written in 1798, a few miles

above Tintern Abbey,' in which the poet, having attributed to his intermediate recollections of the landscape then revisited a benign influence over many acts of daily life, describes thus the other particulars in which he is indebted to them:—

'Nor less I trust
To them I may have owed another gift
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things. If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
In darkness, and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight, when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
Oh sylvan Wye! thou wanderer through the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!'

If it were possible to read or repeat such passages too often, we might stop here; for there are probably few portions of Mr. Wordsworth's works which are better known; but they have become thus familiar because they are eminently characteristic, and for the same reason they should not be omitted from our view of Mr. Wordsworth's philosophy. Having reverted to his first visit to the Wye, which was in his early youth, he proceeds:—

'Nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements, all gone by)
To me was all in all. I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn, nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed, for such loss I would believe
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on Nature, not as in the hour

Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. . . .
. . . Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half create
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In Nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.'

This impassioned love of nature is interfused through the whole of Mr. Wordsworth's system of thought, filling up all interstices, penetrating all recesses, colouring all media, supporting, associating, and giving coherency and mutual relevancy to it in all its parts. Though man is his subject, yet is man never presented to us divested of his relations with external nature. Man is the text, but there is always a running commentary of natural phenomena. In his great work, 'the mind of man' is, as he announces, 'the haunt and the main region of his song;' but the mind

of man, as exhibited by Mr. Wordsworth, whatever else it may be, hardly ever fails to be the mirror of natural objects, and more or less the creature of their power.

The vivacity with which he is accustomed to apprehend this power of inanimate nature over the human mind has indeed led him in some cases, we venture to think, too far; not indeed in his philosophic views, for we are not of opinion that the excess to which we allude should be placed to their account; but, we should say, in his poetical licenses, or in that particular poetic license by which sensation is attributed to inanimate objects —the particular feeling which they excite in the spectator being ascribed to themselves as if they were sentient beings. Thus we find in the 'Intimations of Immortality'—

> 'The moon doth with delight
> Look round her when the Heavens are bare.'

And in the same ode—

> 'Ye fountains, meadows, hills, and groves,
> Think not of any severing of our loves.'

In 'The Excursion'—

'Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth,
And ocean's liquid mass, beneath him lay
In gladness and deep joy.'

We are aware that there are passages in Mr. Wordsworth's works which might lead to the supposition that this mode of expression was in some degree connected with his philosophic creed:—

'And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.'

The only sense, however, in which we can understand this and some similar passages is, as representing inanimate objects to be the symbols or types of feelings, the sentient seat of which is in their Creator. The evidences and results of a feeling may thus be said to pervade inanimate creation, and natural objects may be described as both the

effect of a feeling in Him who created them, and the cause of a feeling in those who survey them. But to represent them as the *seat* of a feeling must be considered merely as a license indulged in by the poet, for the purpose of more forcibly assimilating in the mind of his readers the type with the archetype. As a poetical license, the commutation may be justifiable even in its most naked form; but to the frequent recurrence of it we object, as we should to the iteration of any other very bold figure of speech. There is one theory, it is true, upon which it might be supposed to be more than a mere figurative mode of expression,—the theory that there is no such thing as inanimate nature, and that every visible particle of matter is a congeries of animalculæ. It is clear, however, that if this purely physical hypothesis would support the terms employed by Mr. Wordsworth, it would destroy the spirit and meaning which they are intended to convey.

But if we think that there may be met with in Mr. Wordsworth's writings, passages which

his love of nature has impressed with some traces of inordinate desires, instigating the imagination to fictions of impossible fulfilments—desires for community of feeling and reciprocity of spiritual communication with things inanimate;—if we conceive ourselves to detect some tokens in these passages of the 'dizzy raptures' of which he speaks as having characterised his passion for nature in its earlier stages—we yet entertain the opinion with diffidence, and not without the consciousness that we may not have fully comprehended the scope and purport of Mr. Wordsworth's more imaginative flights; and that we may possibly be of the number of those critics who 'take upon them to report of the course which *he* holds whom they are utterly unable to accompany,—confounded if he turn quick upon the wing, dismayed if he soar steadily "into the region."' Be this as it may, we hold ourselves competent to appreciate the aid afforded to Mr. Wordsworth's philosophical meditations by that more sedate, but not less deeply-seated, love of nature,—

that *wedded* love by which his works are more generally characterised. We can perceive in what manner the intellectual vision, cleared, by virtue of this love, from the obstructions of petty cares as well as turbid excitements, and yet stimulated to activity by the impulse of pleasurable emotion, is—

> 'Made quick to recognize
> The moral properties and scope of things.'

We can perceive how the habit of contemplating natural objects in their causative character may not only make all nature seem to live in the eyes of the poet, but may also teach the philosopher to penetrate farther into the *passive* properties of living beings—their properties not only as agents but as objects. As an example of this perspicacity, let us adduce the poem entitled the 'Old Cumberland Beggar.'

> 'The aged man
> Had placed his staff across the broad smooth stone
> That overlays the pile, and from a bag
> All white with flour, the dole of village dames,
> He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one,
> And scanned them with a fixed and serious look

Of idle computation. . . . .
Him from my childhood I have known, and then
He was so old, he seems not older now.
He travels on, a solitary man;
So helpless in appearance, that for him
The sauntering horseman-traveller does not throw
With careless hand his alms upon the ground,
But stops, that he may safely lodge the coin
Within the old man's hat. . . . .
He travels on a solitary man;
His age has no companion. On the ground
His eyes are turned, and as he moves along
They move along the ground; and evermore,
Instead of common and habitual sight
Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
And the blue sky, one little span of earth
Is all his prospect. Thus, from day to day,
Bow-bent, his eyes for ever on the ground,
He plies his weary journey, seeing still,
And seldom knowing that he sees—some straw,
Some scattered leaf, or marks which, in one track,
The nails of cart or chariot wheel have left
Impressed on the white road, in the same line,
At distance still the same. Poor traveller!
His staff trails with him—scarcely do his feet
Disturb the summer dust; he is so still
In look and motion, that the cottage curs,
Ere he have passed the door, will turn away,
Weary of barking at him. Boys and girls,
The vacant and the busy, maids and youths,
And urchins newly breeched—all pass him by:
Him even the slow-paced waggon leaves behind.'

It would be difficult to present to the imagination, with more curious distinctness, the picture of a human being whose uses upon earth were over. Such certainly would be the conclusion of an ordinary observer. A form of humanity it would be said—a shell or husk of a human being, than which nothing could be conceived more neutral, more nugatory. But the poet, if at a loss to assign any active uses to such an existence, can discover in it a rich endowment of passive attributes.

'Deem him not
A burthen of the earth! 'Tis Nature's law
That none, the meanest of created things,
Of forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked. While thus he creeps
From door to door, the villagers in him
Behold a record which together binds
Past deeds and offices of charity,
Else unremembered; and so keeps alive
The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years,
And that half-wisdom half-experience gives,
Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
To selfishness and cold oblivious cares.
Among the farms and solitary huts,

Hamlets and thinly scattered villages,
Where'er the aged beggar takes his rounds,
The mild necessity of use compels
To acts of love; and habit does the work
Of reason; yet prepares that after joy
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,
Doth find herself insensibly disposed
To virtue and true goodness. Some there are,
By their good works exalted, lofty minds
And meditative, authors of delight
And happiness, which to the end of time
Will live and spread and kindle; even such minds
In childhood, from this solitary being,
Or from like wanderer, haply have received
(A thing more precious far than all that books
Or the solicitudes of love can do!)
That first mild touch of sympathy and thought,
In which they found their kindred with a world
Where want and sorrow were. The easy man
Who sits at his own door, and, like the pear
That overhangs his head from the green wall,
Feeds in the sunshine; the robust and young,
The prosperous and unthinking, they who live
Sheltered, and flourish in a little grove
Of their own kindred—all behold in him
A silent monitor, which on their minds
Must needs impress a transitory thought
Of self-congratulation, to the heart
Of each recalling his peculiar boons,
His charters and exemptions; and, perchance,
Though he to no one give the fortitude

And circumspection needful to preserve
His present blessings, and to husband up
The respite of the season, he, at least,
And 'tis no vulgar service, makes them felt.
Yet further——'

Yet further, indeed, we could with pleasure follow out the investigation into the manifold uses of a being by whom nothing can be *done;* but space fails us, and we pass to the closing benediction, with which, whether in terms or in spirit, the benevolence of the poet never fails to crown his philosophy:—

'Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
And—while in that vast solitude to which
The tide of things has borne him, he appears
To breathe and live but for himself alone—
Unblamed, uninjured, let him bear about
The good which the benignant law of heaven
Has hung around him; and, while life is his,
Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
To tender offices and pensive thoughts.
Then let him pass—a blessing on his head!
And long as he can wander, let him breathe
The freshness of the valleys; let his blood
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
Beat his grey locks against his withered face.
Reverence the hope whose vital anxiousness
Gives the last human interest to his heart.

May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY,
Make him a captive! for that pent-up din,
Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,
Be his the natural silence of old age!
Let him be free of mountain solitudes,
And have around him, whether heard or not,
The pleasant melody of woodland birds.
Few are his pleasures; if his eyes have now
Been doomed so long to settle on the earth,
That not without some effort they behold
The countenance of the horizontal sun,
Rising or setting, let the light at least
Find a free entrance to those languid orbs;
And let him, where and when he will, sit down
Beneath the trees, or by the grassy bank
Of highway side, and with the little birds
Share his chance-gathered meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die!'

It is such poems as these that forcibly recommend to us the tenet, that—

'he who feels contempt
For any living thing, has faculties
Which he has never used.'

And it is by them that we are impressed with a sense of the dignity of that order of mind in which the contemplative faculty may be so justly called to an undivided predominance.

Never, indeed, was the mind of man imbued with a deeper sense of the dignity of his calling than that which pervades the writings of Mr. Wordsworth; and many are they who, though conscious that no such calling is theirs, that no such spirit has descended upon them, have nevertheless been filled by those writings with aspirations which lifted them as high as it was in their nature to rise above the level of ephemeral pursuits and unworthy ambition. The sanative influence of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is felt—where such influence is most wanted—in natures of peculiar sensibility; and it applies itself to that which in those natures is commonly the peccant part. Gross corruption or demoralization is not ordinarily to be apprehended for such minds; but they are subject to be weakened, wasted, and degraded by the vanities and petty distractions of social life, or by accesses of casual and futile amatory sentiment. The love of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry takes possession of such a mind like a virtuous passion, fortifying it against many selfish and many sentimental weak-

nesses, precluding trivial excitement, and coupling the indulgence (necessary in one way or another) of passionate feeling, with serious study, and as much of intellectual exercise as the understanding may happen to have strength to bear. To such a mind, conceiving greater things than it can take firm hold of, marking out for itself a loftier course of life than it has steadiness to pursue, and feeling itself dwarfed by the height of its own moral standard,—how often and with what an invigorating impulse will those passages recur, in which Mr. Wordsworth has invoked, with all plainness and gravity of style, but with an earnestness not on that account the less impressive, the aid which is requisite to make the weak stand fast:—

'If such theme
May sort with highest objects, then, dread Power,
Whose gracious favour is the primal source
Of all illumination, may my life
Express the image of a better time,
More wise desires, and simpler manners; nurse
My heart in genuine freedom: all pure thoughts
Be with me,—so shall thy unfailing love
Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end!'

Who that, with the consciousness of a better birthright, has felt himself from time to time subjugated by the petty tyranny of circumstance, by idle sympathies and ignoble inducements, and suffered from the shame of such subjugation,—could not repeat those few words—

'——— nurse
My heart in genuine freedom——'

with the frequency of a daily prayer, and with such a hope to be heard as might well be inspired by feeling himself, for the moment at least, a sharer in the fervency of the invocation? To these lights in the poetical hemisphere such an aspirant might look up, in seasons of pressure, as Wallenstein did to the star, the sight of which had so often 'shot strength into his heart.'

Of the nature of this genuine freedom, or freedom of the heart, in its several kinds, we have some further intimations in the 'Ode to Duty.' That poem points first to the freedom of native innocence, a state in which, through some rare happiness of

nature and friendliness of fortune, some human beings are to be found, whose impulses scarcely need either direction or control, and to whom it is given to be thoughtlessly good:

> 'There are who ask not if Thine eye
> Be on them; who, in love and truth,
> Where no misgiving is, rely
> Upon the genial sense of youth:
> Glad hearts! without reproach or blot;
> Who do thy work and know it not.'

It is seldom, indeed, that the duties of life can be gone through with so loose a rein; and when an instance does occur in which what is spontaneous is all-sufficient, and continues so after early youth, it will almost always be found to be in the case of one whose scope of being is not naturally large. Wherever there is an abundance of human nature with its passions and powers, not only does self-government become necessary to check their exorbitancies, but thoughtfulness becomes a condition of a dutiful life, inasmuch as the qualities of such a being neces-

sarily draw him into more complicated and pregnant relations with his fellow-creatures. Wherein, then, is to consist the freedom of *his* heart? We answer, in self-government upon a large scale,—in so ordering the circumstances of his life and determining the general direction in which his powers and feelings shall be cultivated, as may clear him from petty wrestlings with his inclinations and from multiplied efforts and restraints,—in so dealing, that is, with his years and months, as shall impart a certain orderly liberty to his days and hours. It is thus that the virtue of the man may be assimilated to the free innocence of the child, and be invested with some of its charms; and the man who has thus looked to the regulation of his mind in the main, may go on his way doing what he likes, inasmuch as he has first taken a security for liking what is good. Occasions will arise, no doubt, not unfrequently, in the manifold contingencies which life, howsoever ordered, must present, on which specific and extemporaneous self-

government will be called for; but no man will make the most of his better nature who does not so place himself in life, and so manage his mind, as to give free play to all his natural dispositions which are not evil, and to make his acts of virtue, where it is possible, enjoyments and not restraints. It is this *genial* virtue, falling back, when need is, upon severe virtue for support, that Mr. Wordsworth describes in the beautiful stanza following that which we last quoted from the 'Ode to Duty:'—

'Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet find that other strength, according to their need.'

We have now sketched as many traits of Mr. Wordsworth's philosophy as may be sufficient to indicate to any of our readers who may be unacquainted with his works

the quality of their moral materials. We proceed to other topics.

In the NARRATIVE Poems of Mr. Wordsworth (with the exception of the 'White Doe of Rylstone'), his peculiarities in respect to subject, treatment, and style, are perhaps even more strongly marked than in those parts of his works which are more directly philosophical. Amongst the narrative poems we include, and, indeed, would place prominently, the story of 'Margaret,' in the first book of the 'Excursion,' and the series of stories in the sixth and seventh books; and we would select as examples, more conspicuous even than these, the pastoral poem, entitled 'Michael' and the story of the 'Female Vagrant.' The incidents related in these poems, if not actually matters of fact (which probably most of them were), are such as might have occurred just as easily and naturally as any of the real events of life which we are accustomed to hear of,—we had almost said to hear of every day; but if not so, still to become

familiar with in the course of a few years passed in the sphere of life to which they belong. There is nothing romantic in them. The poet writes in the confidence of his power to impart interest to the realities of life, deriving both the confidence and the power from the deep interest which he feels in them. It is an attribute of great susceptibility of imagination to need no extraordinary provocatives; and when this is combined with intensity of observation and peculiar force of language, it is the high privilege of the poet so endowed to rest upon the common realities of life and to dispense with its anomalies,—leaving to less gifted writers the representation of strange fatalities and of 'nature erring from itself.'

Michael had received from his forefathers the inheritance of a piece of land near Grasmere in Cumberland, and his calling was to tend his flocks upon the mountains. The land had been burthened when it came to him, and it was not till he was forty years of age that, by continual vigilance and toil, he

had cleared it of debt. His wife was twenty years younger than himself. They passed through middle age a solitary couple—

> 'neither gay perhaps
> Nor cheerful; yet with objects and with hopes,
> Living a life of eager industry,—'

and Michael was beginning to think himself an old man when a child was born to him. This only child became the object of his most devoted attachment; and was brought up to his father's occupation till his eighteenth year, when Michael lost half what he was worth by the failure of a nephew for whom he was surety. He then made up his mind to send his son to a relation who was a tradesman in London, in order that there might be a prospect of retrieving through him the fortunes of the family; the son went in great hope and with good dispositions; but after he had been some time in London, he took to evil courses, and absconding from their consequences, sought an asylum beyond seas. In a few years the old man died; his wife did not long

survive him; and their land passed into the hands of a stranger.

Such is the story of Michael; and probably no poet ever contented himself with what would be thought a tamer theme. It is worth while to inquire, therefore, by what singular power it is that Mr. Wordsworth has been enabled to carry this theme to the hearts of many thousands of readers. Simplicity of narration would clearly be insufficient of itself to produce such an effect. The *facts* are not enough. The human heart is not so tender or so easily touched, as to respond feelingly to a simple communication of what happened to Michael. Any want of simplicity would at once destroy the effect; but simplicity the most scriptural would not of itself suffice to produce it.

We are disposed to think that the effect is in the first place to be ascribed to the reader's recognition of *power* in the mind of the writer. Facts which would not interest him otherwise are made to do so by the consciousness that they have interested a powerful mind. He is

interested in perceiving the effect of them upon that mind, and his sympathies with the powerful are brought in aid of his sympathies with the pathetic. The *language* of the poet therefore, as the symbol of his power, contributes mainly to the effect.

There are many readers who would in vain search the language of Mr. Wordsworth for tokens of the power which we speak of,—many to whom, in such narratives as 'Michael,' his language would be a dead letter as well as his theme. There are many also to whom the language of David in his lamentation over the death of Absalom would be a dead letter, were it not in the Bible that they read it. To such readers violence is power; abrupt and startling ejaculations, or extravagant figures of speech, constitute the language of passion. Mr. Wordsworth's language addresses itself to other ears—to the ears of those who feel that truthfulness of language gives force, and that habits of just and exact thinking give truthfulness; to the ears of those who understand the strength which lies in

moderation, where thought is to be conveyed, —or where feelings are the subject, the enthusiasm which lies in the language of reserve.

Next to the sense of power, as betokened by language, which Mr. Wordsworth's narratives convey, we would adduce, as principally contributing to their influence over the imagination, the minute familiarity which they evince with the modes of life represented in them and with the feelings belonging to those modes of life. It is only through sympathy that such familiarity can be acquired; and that which is begotten by sympathy begets it. Mr. Wordsworth's mind, being not only poetical and philosophical but also eminently practical, becomes readily conversant with the affairs and pursuits of men in every sphere, and sees into their daily life. In treating of the lower classes, where the range of objects is necessarily narrow, whilst this very limitation tends to direct the feelings upon them with a concentrated force, he not only deals with the natural affections of the shepherd or the ploughman, but also concerns

himself with their applications of such intellectual gifts as they possess to such ends as lie within their reach; he understands the pleasure and pride attaching to skill in their craft; he enters into the spirit of their ordinary occupations, of their dealings for the lucre of gain,—into the cares of their poverty and the interests of their thrift. Mr. Wordsworth is, in truth, one of those rare individuals, who, being best placed where he is in life, would not however have been misplaced in any situation whatever. For whilst he is endowed with the highest intellectual powers in the largest measure, it is his singular felicity to possess also all the inferior faculties, each in its due proportion; in short, to be in possession of a complete mind. Hence it is that let his Fancy transport him amongst what order of mankind she may, he can make himself at home amongst them, understand their predicament, partake their life: hence it is that let his Fancy recommend to him for particular representation whatever individuals may please her best, he can bid

the guests welcome, and afford them cordial entertainment, until they become, as it were, domesticated in his mind.

Thus, to return to 'Michael,' the interests and pursuits of the Shepherd are described in that poem, as well as the affections of the Father:—

'His mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes,
When others heeded not, he heard the south
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.
The shepherd, at such warning, of his flock
Bethought him, and to himself would say,
"The winds are now devising work for me."
And, truly, at all times, the storm that drives
The traveller to a shelter, summoned him
Up to the mountains: he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists
That came to him and left him on the heights.
So lived he till his eightieth year was passed;
And grossly that man errs who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks
Were things indifferent to the shepherd's thoughts:
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air; the hills which he so oft

Had climbed with vigorous step; which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind
Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
The certainty of honourable gain;
Those fields, those hills,—what could they less? had laid
Strong hold on his affections, were to him
A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself.'

So felt the Shepherd: let us now pass to the portraiture of the Father:—

'Thus living on through such a length of years,
The shepherd, if he loved himself, must needs
Have loved his helpmate. But to Michael's heart
This son of his old age was yet more dear;
Less from instinctive tenderness, the same
Blind spirit which is in the blood of all,
Than that a child, more than all other gifts,
Brings hope with it and forward-looking thoughts,
And stirrings of inquietude, when they
By tendency of nature needs must fail.
Exceeding was the love he bare to him,
His heart and his heart's joy! for oftentimes
Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
Had done him female service, not alone
For pastime and delight, as is the use
Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
His cradle with a woman's gentle hand.

And in a later time, ere yet the boy
Had put on boy's attire, did Michael love,
Albeit of a stern unbending mind,
To have the young one in his sight, when he
Had work by his own door, or when he sat
With sheep before him on his shepherd's stool.
. . . . There while they two were sitting in the shade
With others round them, earnest all and blithe,
Would Michael exercise his heart with looks
Of fond correction and reproof bestowed
Upon the child, if he disturbed the sheep
By catching at their legs, or with his shouts
Scared them, while they lay still beneath the shears.
. . . . But soon as Luke, full ten years old, could stand
Against the mountain blasts,—and to the heights,
Not fearing toil, nor length of weary ways,
He with his father daily went, and they
Were as companions,—why should I relate
That objects which the shepherd loved before
Were dearer now? that from the boy there came
Feelings and emanations,—things which were
Light to the sun and music to the wind;
And that the old man's heart seemed born again?'

Then comes the account of the disaster which befel Michael in the loss of half his substance, which reduced him to the alternative of sending his son to London or of parting with the land which had descended to him from his ancestors. Those who are

acquainted with the yeomanry of the north of England know how peculiarly powerful are their feelings of local attachment and their love of their small landed inheritances. In that singular production called 'The Doctor, &c.' (a book which, with all its wanton absurdities, is rich beyond almost any other of the time in the best knowledge and the most beautiful literature), it is well observed, that 'to have held these small patrimonies unimpaired, as well as unenlarged, through so many generations, implies more contentment, more happiness, and a more uniform course of steadiness and good conduct, than could be found in the proudest genealogies.' Under the influence of these local and proprietary feelings (which, on this side the borders, have now lost their hold on all but the secluded mountaineers of Cumberland and Westmoreland), the shepherd-yeoman resolved upon the alternative of sending his son forth to seek his fortune. Near a brook, in the depths of the valley, Michael had gathered together a heap of

loose stones, with the intention of building a sheepfold there. Thither he took his son on the eve of his departure, and desired him to lay the first stone of the sheepfold, that it might be a covenant between them:—

'This was a work for us; and now, my son,
It is a work for me. But lay one stone—
Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.
Nay, boy, be of good hope; we both may live
To see a better day. At eighty-four
I still am strong and hale; do thou thy part;
I will do mine. I will begin again
With many tasks that were resigned to thee:
Up to the heights and in among the storms
Will I without thee go again, and do
All works which I was wont to do alone,
Before I knew thy face.'

Accordingly, when his son was gone, the old shepherd resumed his duties manfully, and from time to time worked at the building of the sheepfold; and he was cheered for some time by loving letters from the boy, and by satisfactory tidings of his conduct. But at length came the accounts of an opposite tenor,—that he had given himself up to dissolute courses, that ignominy and shame had

fallen upon him, and, finally, that he had been driven to seek a hiding-place beyond the seas:—

'There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain or break the heart.
I have conversed with more than one who well
Remember the old man, and what he was
Years after he had heard these heavy news.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength. Among the rocks
He went, and still looked up towards the sun,
And listened to the wind; and, as before,
Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
And for the land his small inheritance.
And to that hollow dell from time to time
Did he repair, to build the fold of which
His flock had need. 'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the old man; and 'tis believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went,
And never lifted up a single stone.'

It will be perceived that the poem of 'Michael,' being in blank verse, affords scope for more detail than could well be introduced into a poem in rhyme. The 'Female Vagrant' is in rhymed stanzas, and if we had room we should wish to quote it at length, as a specimen

of Mr. Wordsworth's narrative poems, written in a different manner from that of 'Michael,' with equal force and effect. The symmetry of this narrative is so perfect, and must constitute, especially to those who look at it in its wholeness with the eyes of an artist, so peculiar a charm, that we have hesitated to take it to pieces. But the hands of criticism are proverbially irreverent, and briefly sketching the story of the poem as we proceed, we shall break it up for illustrations without further scruple.

The Female Vagrant tells her own tale, and begins with her childhood. To men (like ourselves) whose benevolence is not so readily awakened as might be wished in behalf of those of their fellow-creatures who wear a coarse outside, the aspect of adult rustic life may be uninteresting,—except, indeed, in some occasional instances, when an inherent refinement of nature has triumphed over external circumstances, or (which is perhaps equally unfrequent in the class) when inborn beauty is so predominant as to make up for

all deficiencies. But childhood has its charms in every sphere of life; and also, though with a marked difference of degree and prevalence as we descend to the *laborious* classes, its beauty and its grace. The effects of toil, exposure to the weather, and narrow cares, have not, at that age, had time to tell upon the countenance, and give it that unliving and unmeaning barrenness of expression which physical hardship has a tendency to induce, but which still more surely results when the lines of advancing life have been traced by care and not by thought—when the loss of animal beauty and animal spirits has been uncompensated. The child of rustic life not having suffered the loss, and having no need of the compensation, has all the attractiveness of appearance which it may have pleased nature to bestow; and its manners and social feelings have hardly yet felt the influence of artificial distinctions, and of the distrust which they too often engender. To us the child of the peasant has often been the link through which we have reached a feeling of human

fellowship with the parent. It is true that no such intermediary ought to be needed; but such are the insensibilities of many minds, and such are the approaches by which they are to be overcome; and skilfully is it therefore that the poet has made the subject of his story first present herself at the period of her childhood.

'My father was a good and pious man,
An honest man by honest parents bred;
And I believe that soon as I began
To lisp, he made me kneel beside my bed,
And in his hearing there my prayers I said:
And afterwards by my good father taught,
I read, and loved the books in which I read;
For books in every neighbouring house I sought,
And nothing to my mind a sweeter pleasure brought.

'Can I forget what charms did once adorn
My garden, stored with peas, and mint, and thyme,
And rose, and lily, for the sabbath morn?
The sabbath bells, and their delightful chime;
The gambols and wild freaks at shearing time;
My hen's rich nest through long grass scarce espied;
The cowslip-gathering in June's dewy prime;
The swans that when I sought the water-side,
From far to meet me came, spreading their snowy pride?

'The staff I yet remember which upbore
The bending body of my active sire;

His seat beneath the honeyed sycamore
Where the bees hummed, and chair by winter fire;
When market morning came, the neat attire
With which, though bent on haste, myself I decked;
My watchful dog, whose starts of furious ire,
When stranger passed, so often have I checked;
The redbreast, known for years, which at my casement pecked.

'The suns of twenty summers danced along,
Ah! little marked how fast they rolled away:
But through severe mischance and cruel wrong
My father's substance fell into decay:
We toiled and struggled—hoping for a day
When fortune should put on a kinder look;
But vain were wishes—efforts vain as they;
He from his old hereditary nook
Must part,—the summons came,—our final leave we took.

'It was indeed a miserable hour
When, from the last hill-top, my sire surveyed,
Peering above the trees, the steeple tower
That on his marriage-day sweet music made.
Till then he hoped his bones might there be laid,
Close by my mother in their native bowers:
Bidding me trust in God, he stood and prayed;—
I could not pray: through tears that fell in showers
Glimmered our dear-loved home, alas, no longer ours!

'There was a youth whom I had loved so long,
That when I loved him not I cannot say:
Mid the green mountains many a thoughtless song
We two had sung, like gladsome birds in May;
When we began to tire of childish play,

We seemed still more and more to prize each other:
We talked of marriage and our marriage-day;
And I in truth did love him like a brother,
For never could I hope to meet with such another.

'Two years were passed since to a distant town
He had repaired to ply the artist's trade;
What tears of bitter grief, till then unknown!
What tender vows our last sad kiss delayed!
To Him we turned—we had no other aid:
Like one revived upon his neck I wept,
And her whom he had loved in joy, he said,
He well could love in grief; his faith he kept;
And in a quiet home once more my father slept.

'We lived in peace and comfort; and were blest
With daily bread, by constant toil supplied.
Three lovely infants lay upon my breast;
And often viewing their sweet smiles I sighed
And knew not why. My happy father died—
When sad distress reduced the children's meal;
Thrice happy! that for him the grave did hide
The empty loom, cold hearth, and silent wheel,
And tears that flowed for ills which patience could not heal.

''Twas a hard change; an evil time was come,
We had no hope, and no relief could gain.
But soon, with proud parade, the noisy drum
Beat round, to sweep the streets of want and pain:
My husband's arms now only served to strain
Me and his children hungering in his view;
In such dismay my prayers and tears were vain:
To join those miserable men he flew;
And now to the sea-coast with numbers more we drew.'

Nothing is more remarkable in this narrative than the even and quiet rapidity of its progress from beginning to end; and it costs us an effort to interrupt it; but we must put the next events into still fewer words than the few (marvellously few, considering the effect produced) in which they are told by the poet. She follows her husband to the theatre of war, and through many miseries by sea and land; and after his death by the sword, and that of her children by famine and pestilence, she embarks again for England :—

'The vessel reached its bound;
And homeless near a thousand homes I stood,
And near a thousand tables pined and wanted food.

'By grief enfeebled was I turned adrift,
Helpless as sailor cast on desert rock;
Nor morsel to my mouth that day did lift,
Nor dared my hand at any door to knock;
I lay where, with his drowsy mates, the cock
From the cross-timber of an outhouse hung:
Dismally tolled, that night, the city clock!
At morn my sick heart hunger scarcely stung,
Nor to the beggar's language could I fit my tongue.

'So passed another day, and so the third;
Then did I try in vain the crowd's resort.

—In deep despair by frightful wishes stirred,
Near the sea-side I reached a ruined fort;
There, pains which nature could no more support,
With blindness linked, did on my vitals fall,
And after many interruptions short
Of hideous sense, I sank, nor step could crawl;
Unsought for was the help that did my life recall.

'Borne to an hospital I lay with brain
Drowsy and weak, and shattered memory;
I heard my neighbours, in their beds, complain
Of many things which never troubled me;
Of feet still bustling round with busy glee;
Of looks where common kindness had no part;
Of service done with careless cruelty,
Fretting the fever round the languid heart;
And groans which, as they said, might make a dead man start.

'These things just served to stir the torpid sense,
Nor pain nor pity in my bosom raised.
With strength did memory return; and, thence
Dismissed, again on open day I gazed,
At houses, men, and common light amazed.
The lanes I sought, and as the sun retired,
Came where beneath the trees a faggot blazed;
The travellers saw me weep, my fate inquired,
And gave me food,—and rest, more welcome, more desired.

'They, with their panniered asses, semblance made
Of potters wandering on from door to door;
But life of happier sort to me pourtrayed,
And other joys my fancy to allure;
The bagpipe dinning on the midnight moor,

In barn uplighted; and companions boon
Well met from far with revelry secure,
Among the forest glades, when jocund June
Rolled fast along the sky his warm and genial moon.

'But ill they suited me—these journeys dark
O'er moor and mountain, midnight theft to hatch,
To charm the surly house-dog's faithful bark,
Or hang on tiptoe at the lifted latch.
The gloomy lantern and the dim blue match,
The black disguise, the warning whistle shrill,
The ear still busy on its nightly watch,
Were not for me, brought up in nothing ill;
Besides, on griefs so fresh my thoughts were brooding still.

'What could I do, unaided and unblest?
My father! gone was every friend of thine:
And kindred of dead husband are at best
Small help; and after marriage such as mine,
With little kindness would to me incline.
Ill was I then for toil and service fit:
With tears whose course no effort could confine,
By the road side forgetful would I sit
Whole hours, my idle arms in moping sorrow knit.

I led a wandering life among the fields;
Contentedly, yet sometimes self-accused;
I lived upon what casual bounty yields,
Now coldly given, now utterly refused.
The ground I for my bed have often used:
But, what afflicts my peace with keenest ruth
Is, that I have my inner self abused,
Forgone the home delight of constant truth,
And clear and open soul, so prized in fearless youth.

'Three years thus wandering, often have I viewed,
In tears, the sun toward that country tend
Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude;
And now across this moor my steps I bend,
Oh! tell me whither—for no earthly friend
Have I.—She ceased, and weeping turned away;
As if because her tale was at an end
She wept; because she had no more to say
Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay.'

It is not till we have read this poem often enough to moderate our sense of its interest and pathos, that we become sensible to the consummate art with which it is constructed; to the free vigour of the language; to the 'liquid lapse' of the verse—sliding on with a smooth and solid melody like a swollen river. Nor is it less distinguished by these attributes than by the care which is taken that there shall be no points, no prominences, nothing which shall *arrest* attention and exact admiration for parts to the injury of the rest—of the whole; no fractional effects. The tone is everywhere kept down to what can be equally sustained by the poet, and continuously borne with by the reader.

In the last edition of Mr. Wordsworth's

works there are contained no less than between three and four hundred SONNETS. These productions differ from those which we have hitherto dwelt upon, in exhibiting less, or perhaps nothing, of the peculiarities of homeliness in subject and style by which the latter are characterised. This form of poetry, not admitting of the breadth and magnitude which is requisite to give effect to his more characteristic style, has led Mr. Wordsworth to lay aside the implements of the architect and assume those of the sculptor. Few are the works of art in this kind which are so pure in their material, so graceful in their execution, so delicately wrought, so exquisitely chiselled. Yet bright and ornate as many of these productions are, there is in them, no less than in his other poems, a constant abstinence from antitheses and false effects. The words are always felt to be used, first and mainly because they are those which best express the meaning; secondly and subordinately, because they convey to the ear the sounds which best harmonise with the meaning

and with each other. There is hardly one of these three or four hundred sonnets which ends in a point. Pointed lines will sometimes occur in the course of them, as thought will sometimes naturally take a pointed shape in the mind; but whether it takes that shape or another is obviously treated as a matter of indifference; nothing is sacrificed to it; and at the close of the sonnet, where the adventitious effect of the point might be apt to outshine the intrinsic value of the subject, it seems to have been studiously avoided. Mr. Wordsworth's sonnet never goes off, as it were, with a clap or repercussion at the close; but is thrown up like a rocket, breaks into light, and falls in a soft shower of brightness. To none, indeed, of the minor forms of poetry are Mr. Wordsworth's powers better adapted; there is none to which discrimination in thought and aptitude in language are more essential; and there never was a poet who reached so near to perfection in these particulars as Mr. Wordsworth. That sonnet may be instanced which, standing at the head

of the second part of the miscellaneous series, presents to us, as it were, a picture-gallery of his predecessors in this walk of the art:—

'Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakspeare unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camöens soothed an exile's grief;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle-leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow; a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Fairy-land
To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!'

When have poetry and criticism mingled more genially than in these fourteen lines of rapid retrospect, into which, without any apparent labour of compression, how much is compressed! What ease, gracefulness, and variety attend the procession of the verse; and after rising in animation, with what a gentle fall does it die away upon the ear at the close! This is the 'clausula aut

cadentia,'—the 'ars placidè elabendi,' which was anciently so much esteemed in the science of music.

Amongst the Sonnets to Liberty there are some loftier strains than almost any that have been sounded upon historical and contemporary themes, since the breath ceased which uttered that tremendous imprecation—

> 'Avenge, oh Lord! thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
> Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold!'—

we say loftier than *almost* any, for we cannot forget Mr. Southey's 'Ode, written during the Negociations with Buonaparte in 1814.' The catalogue of massacres in the penultimate stanza, followed by the summary of murders in the last stanza of that ode; the grave and not ungoverned, but at the same time irresistible and fiery vehemence which pervades it, have made it always appear in our eyes the most awful judgment that ever was denounced in song. Mr. Wordsworth's series of Sonnets to Liberty arose, also, out of the events connected with

Buonaparte's domination; but *he* writes more in sorrow than in anger, whilst Southey, like Milton, fulminates his censures more in anger and scorn than in sorrow,—pursuing the oppressor in a just and virtuous spirit, but also in a spirit deeply vindictive, and with what would have been called in old times 'a mineral hatred.' The dignified and melancholy anger, the anger 'slow and spiritual,' with which Mr. Wordsworth contemplates the tyrant's career, admits more of meditative thought into his effusions on such topics; though dull must be the reader to whom these also are not 'soul-animating strains:'—witness the following, addressed to Toussaint L'Ouverture:—

'TOUSSAINT, the most unhappy man of men!
Whether the whistling rustic tend his plough
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den;—
Oh miserable chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience? Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;

There 's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.'

Bear witness, also, the 'Thought of a Briton on the subjugation of Switzerland:'—

'Two voices are there: one is of the Sea,
One of the Mountains; each a mighty voice;
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty!
There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee
Thou fought'st against him; but hast vainly striven,
Thou from thy Alpine holds at length art driven,
Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.
Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft:
Then cleave, oh cleave to that which still is left;
For, high-souled Maid, what sorrow would it be
That Mountain floods should thunder as before,
And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
And neither awful voice be heard by thee!'

From this notice of Mr. Wordsworth's now collected works we have purposely omitted 'The Excursion,' feeling that it would be in vain to resume that subject unless it were in a separate article, and with an ample field before us. 'The Excursion' does, indeed, though first in importance, come last in order

in the study of Mr. Wordsworth's works; for it will not be fully appreciated unless the reader be first imbued with the spirit in which all that he writes is written. Those who are accustomed to look for a mantling and sparkling of poetic effervescence in every page and line of every poem they read, will find that in 'The Excursion' they have many disappointments to get over. We have known such persons, who would point to particular passages and ask—Where is the poetry in this or that? On such occasions we have commonly made answer, that this or that neither is, is meant to be, nor in any reasonable apprehension ought to be, poetical. In a poem upon so large a scale every genuine poet is aware that some parts should be bordering upon prose, some absolutely prosaic. If it were all the essence of poetry, let it be in other respects what it might, who could read ten pages of it together? Rise and fall, ebb and flow, light and shade,—moor-land and meadow and garden ground,—will be measured out in due proportions

by any one who shall attain the breadth of conception necessary to the composition of a great poem;—the green leaf, the red berry, and the bare bough, each in its season.

Such an artist will also know that it behoves him to apply himself from time to time to manage his transitions, and *transact the business* of his poem; whereas, one who should aim at being always poetical would fall into the same error which beset the clowns rebuked by Hamlet, who insisted upon being always witty; 'though in the meantime some necessary question of the play were then to be considered.' Mr. Wordsworth, in his great work, copiously poetical as he is, uses his stores with a measured plenty, after the manner of the captain of a ship bound upon a long voyage, who, if he has no fears for the exhaustion of his resources, must yet look to the wholesome feeding of his crew, well knowing that their 'alacrity and cheer of mind' depends upon it, and that it were better their diet should be occasionally as dry as 'the remainder

biscuit,' than that they should be heated and gorged.

In the versification, too, there is nothing to satiate: there is a free and copious variety, but only occasionally a marked melody. For an ear which knows of no other rhythmical music than the unqualified up and down movement of trochees and iambs, or the canter of anapæsts, the 'numerous verse' of the 'Excursion' will have been modulated in vain. The uncultivated ear is always best pleased with that which to the ear of the adept is too palpable to be pleasing, except when sparingly mixed with other effects, and much modified by them. We recollect to have heard that when one of the Sandwich Island princes was in this country, he was present at a royal entertainment at which the band from one of the regiments of Guards performed some very scientific and composite pieces of music; the Sandwich Islander was observed to listen most intently, and being asked by one of the company whether he was pleased with the music, he answered

that he had been greatly delighted with the *drum*. In like manner, to the ear of youth or of age uninstructed, a pleasure will be conveyed by 'the very false gallop of verses,' merely because it is the only effect of versification which they can understand; whilst such a variegated intertexture of harmony as 'The Excursion' presents would be wholly lost upon them.

Lost, indeed, to a degree which will be long remarkable in the history of English literature, was that whole poem—both matter and music—for scarcely less than a quarter of a century! and lost upon critical ears (so called for courtesy) as well as upon those of 'the reading public,'—which, indeed, did no other upon the occasion than, *more suo*, believe as it was taught. The Touchstones of the day were of opinion that 'though there was no great matter in the ditty, yet the note was very untuneable;' and such, therefore, was the opinion of the tractable multitude. The manner in which such judgments have gradually given way

and finally disappeared, it is anything but uninstructive to observe. It is, indeed, not only instructive, but edifying, to observe the manner in which the great poet has risen into fame, whilst the small critics have dwindled into insignificance,—the manner in which the witty worldlings of twenty or thirty years ago,—those who made mouths at him in the days of his unpopularity, dealing about their petty acutenesses and exulting in the power to sting,—would now be glad to have it supposed that they knew all the while that they were assailing a great man, but that ridicule, forsooth, being their high vocation, they made it a point to laugh at everything, where they could get the world to laugh with them. These matters, we say, are not unworthy of regard, as exemplifying the different forms which ambition assumes in different orders of mankind.

Mr. Landor, who in his 'Imaginary Conversations' has addressed some forcible admonitions to hasty aspirants in literature,—

those who are ambitious of an early fame,—has described, in characteristic language, the progress of literary reputation:—

'Thus it is with writers who are to have a currency through ages. In the beginning they are confounded with most others; soon they fall into some secondary class; next into one rather less obscure and humble; by degrees they are liberated from the dross and lumber that hamper them; and being once above the heads of cotemporaries, rise slowly and waveringly, then regularly and erectly, then rapidly and majestically, till the vision strains and aches as it pursues them in their ethereal elevation.'*

Mr. Wordsworth, whether or not he was ambitious of an early fame, has lived and written with an unalterable devotedness to the interests of that fame in the account of which the mere contemporary beginnings,—the question of half a century sooner or later,—are as nothing. He has so lived and written, all manner of sarcasm and mockery notwithstanding. It is not easy to conceive a strength of mind more exemplary than that which could enable him, not only to fortify himself against these assaults, but to

* Second Series, vol. ii. p. 7.

withstand the temptation of seeking that popularity which doubtless lay at his immediate command, could he have been seduced into the misapplication of his powers to that end. The manner in which a spirit of religious self-sacrifice—in this life as it were—was inspired by what may be called his worship of his art, may be more or less collected from the sonnet addressed to Mr. Haydon, the painter:—

'High is our calling, Friend!—Creative art
(Whether the instrument of words she use,
Or pencil pregnant with ethereal hues)
Demands the service of a mind and heart,
Though sensitive, yet in their weakest part
Heroically fashioned—to infuse
Faith in the whispers of the lonely muse,
While the whole world seems adverse to desert,
And oh! when Nature sinks, as oft she may,
Through long-lived pressure of obscure distress,
Still to be strenuous for the bright reward,
And in the soul admit of no decay,
Brook no continuance of weak-mindedness—
Great is the glory, for the strife is hard!'

We have spoken of his worship of his art as inspiring this fortitude; but it is also to be attributed to his worship of Nature;

and here again we may quote his own authority:—

> 'Tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy; for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, *that neither evil tongues,*
> *Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,*
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.'

The passages in Mr. Wordsworth's works (few and far between) wherein, as in these, he has alluded to the difficulties which he has had to encounter, will be read in after-times with the same sort of interest which attaches to those portions of the writings of the great poets before him which cast a light upon the story of their lives, and give token of the feelings with which they have read that story to themselves. Perhaps none of these have had cause for so much satisfaction with the tenor of their lives, so far as

it was in their own choice and direction, as Mr. Wordsworth has a right to feel: for which of them has so steadfastly kept faith with the mistress whom he served? Milton, when he complained—or rather let us say, stated without condescending to the language of complaint—that he had fallen upon evil days and evil tongues, could not speak it with the consciousness that he had himself sought peace and ensued it—that his own tongue had been at all times innocuously employed —or that he had not, for too considerable a portion of his life, repudiated his better mind, and yielded himself to the *torva voluptas* of political controversy. Shakspeare, in one of those sonnets which have so perplexed his biographers, reproaches Fortune and himself in a strain which shows how painfully conscious he was that he had lived unworthily of his doubly immortal spirit. Mr. Wordsworth has no such cause, as Shakspeare had, to 'chide with Fortune;' neither has he, like Milton, 'fallen upon evil days,' or at least mixed himself, more than was wise

and necessary, with the evil of the days upon which he has fallen.

We have hazarded these allusions to the personal history of Mr. Wordsworth, because it is not unimportant to a poet's readers to reflect how far he has lived up to the sentiments which he expresses. We have ventured to think, also, that the poetry of Mr. Wordsworth, permeating, as it does, the mind, modes of thinking, and character of those who admire it, constitutes something in the nature of a personal tie between him and them, and thereby renders some reference to his life and character not unfittingly introduced into a criticism upon his works. Our relations with the poets whom we most admire are, indeed, of a more intimate character than almost any others which can exist between strangers; and there is assuredly no poet now living whose connexion with his readers bears a stronger analogy to the best and most durable of our personal friendships. Many attachments taken up in early life, and which are warm and pleasant

while they last, drop off and are left behind us in the necessary course of things; but there are others which not only grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength, but are also bound up with us in our decay. Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is endowed with a beauty which does not, like the toys and gauds of meretricious verse, grow dim to the eyes of age; but such as it is to us in our youth it remains whilst life and intelligence remain,—extending its influence in proportion as we advance in years, and seek to substitute for naturally declining excitabilities, the sense of dignity and power, of solid intellectual aggrandisement and moral purification.

MR. WORDSWORTH'S SONNETS.*

In a previous essay we have ventured upon the task of considering Mr. Wordsworth's poetry at large; but such a subject cannot be treated as it ought to be within the limits to which we confined ourselves, and we will now take the 'Sonnets' into separate consideration, and endeavour to do more justice to a part than we have found it possible to do to the whole. Not that justice can be done to a part of Mr. Wordsworth's or of any great writer's works without having *reference* to the whole. Every portion of such a writer's works has a value beyond its intrinsic worth, as being part and lot of a great mind, and having correlations with every other part; and whether it be from the unity of spirit which is commonly found to pervade the works of a great

* A Critical Essay, reprinted from No. 137 of the Quarterly Review, being that for the Month of December, 1841.

writer whatever may be his variety of manner, or whether it be that there is nothing he has written but must tell us something of his mind (for even his commonplace remarks will tell us that upon occasion he was willing to be commonplace), it is certainly the attribute of such writers to give the coherency of one interest to everything that proceeds from them; and far be it from us to treat Mr. Wordsworth's Sonnets otherwise than as parcel of that great body of doctrine and moral sentiment which constitutes Mr. Wordsworth's mind extant in his works. But by considering the Sonnets principally and the other poems only in relation to them, we shall be enabled to keep our remarks within compass.

Of the many styles in which this poet has written, those of the Sonnets and of 'The Excursion' may be regarded as the farthest apart; 'The Excursion' being the most remarkable of his writings for breadth of style, the Sonnets for compactness. In a long philosophical poem which must necessarily tax the powers of attention, a current and almost

colloquial manner was best fitted to keep the reader at ease, and a continued terseness of diction and condensation of thought, though apparently abridging his labours, in reality would have cost him more than it saved him. That the whole should be flowingly connected, so as to be borne in upon the mind with the weight of one stream, was more for the interests of the subject than that pointed and striking passages should often occur. It was also perhaps expedient that the substance of what was to be said in 'The Excursion' should be supported by its own solidity and truth, and that it should be recommended by the natural eloquence of a fervid mind delivering itself of what is strongly felt, rather than by any frequency of fanciful embellishment, or, as regards the rhythm, by any marked and salient melodies. These things were not to be excluded, but they were to come as they might happen to present themselves to a mind somewhat pre-occupied—they were to be merely occasional and incidental. The Sonnets, on the contrary, address the reader,

each claiming to be considered for itself and by itself; and though, as we have said, not altogether irrespectively of its kindred with other works the issue of the same mind, yet mainly as a substantive poem. And for this kind of poem the style required was the very opposite of that employed in 'The Excursion,' and perhaps also a good deal removed from what fell in with the natural fluency of the poet. Mr. Wordsworth's genius we imagine to have inclined naturally to an easy abundance both of thoughts and words; but art was to predominate over this inclination wheresoever it was not fit to be indulged, and the poetic mind which had been diffused widely with an easy fluctuation through 'The Excursion,' though not changing its nature and spirit, was to take a different structure—was to be inspissated as it were, and form itself into crystals in the Sonnets.

The critic of these Sonnets meets on the threshold of his task two which, being on the subject of this form of poetry, he is naturally called upon to notice first. The

former of them is that picture-gallery in fourteen lines, quoted in our previous article.* How much of literary history is called up in the mind by those few vivid touches, and how much of biography and criticism is contained in them! Yet the condensation occasions no obscurity—historical allusion, sentiment, imagery, exquisite music, distinctive portraiture—all find a place and yet nothing is crowded. And as a fit introduction to the other sonnet upon sonnets, which deals with some abstruser thoughts, we may beg those who complain of obscurity in Mr. Wordsworth's writings to bear in mind the clearness of his language when the subject is merely narrative or picturesque, and to ask themselves whether, when any difficulty occurs, it may not be owing to the subject-matter rather than to the treatment.

'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;
And hermits are contented with their cells;
And students with their pensive citadels:
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,

* See ante, p. 76.

Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom
High as the highest peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:
In truth, the prison unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground:
Pleased if some souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.'

This is one of those doctrinal poems, abounding in Mr. Wordsworth's works, which we have heard some persons complain that they cannot understand, having read them probably as rapidly as they would read any erotic effusion of any glowing gentleman who writes verses. Let us take more time than such readers have to spare and more space than is permitted to a sonnet, and it will not be difficult to evolve the doctrine. We should say, then, that the leading doctrine suggested by this sonnet is, that no enlargement of a man's liberty of action can take place without a corresponding aggravation of his moral responsibility, and that there must needs be some souls which 'feel the weight of too

much liberty,'—such, that is, whose liberty of action is disproportionate to their strength of judgment or of self-control, and must therefore either oppress their conscience, or vex them with the perplexities of an undetermined choice or the consequences of an ungoverned will. Many, indeed, are they who feel in one way or another this 'weight of too much liberty.' The youth who is free to choose a profession has a liberty disproportionate to his knowledge and experience, which is a burthen. The heiress who is free to choose amongst many suitors, finds the difficulty of selection insuperable, and though perhaps any one of them might have been better than no husband, she lives and dies unmarried. The child who knows that obedience will not be enforced upon him, is too free for contentment; and the man who is too absolutely his own master, will find that he has got a troublesome servant. 'Heaven bless thee from a tutor, and discipline come not near thee!' was a deep imprecation, though put into the mouth of the common railer

Thersites. For Shakspeare would often speak his deepest truths in his lightest moods. And by another and a graver poetical moralist, Obedience has been personified in the groom of the chambers who puts the Red-Cross Knight to bed when he is tired:—

> 'Then called she a groom that forth him led
> Into a goodly lodge, and 'gan despoil
> Of puissant arms, and laid in easy bed:
> His name was meek OBEDIENCE rightfully ared.' *

Assuming then that only so much liberty as can be steadily guided and readily subjected to the law of conscience will conduce to our ease, the second conclusion which we draw from the sonnet is, that in parting with any excess of liberty beyond this quantum, our contentment is best secured when this is done spontaneously, and we are ourselves the choosers of the yoke to which we will submit:—

> 'In truth, the prison unto which we doom
> Ourselves, no prison is'—

* Fairy Queen, i. x. 17.

For to have felt the weight of too much liberty is one assurance that we shall be contented with restraint, and when the choice of the species and quantum of restraint has been our own, we should be accusing ourselves if we should quarrel with it. This is the case of the nun, the hermit, and the student. But thirdly, there is noticed the case of those who have never felt the weight of too much liberty, and who have been spared the perplexities of choice by a necessity of circumstances born with them and rendering the restraint which it imposes easy because habitual—

'Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom'—

And this restraint by habit and necessity comes nearest in contentment to—fourthly, restraint by instinct,—that of the bees which

'Murmur by the hour in foxglove bells.'

Such, then, are the views of moral restraint indicated in this poem; and the drift of it is to bring this species of restraint into a comparison mutually illustrative with the

restraint imposed by the laws of the sonnet upon an exuberant and discursive imagination. As of the moral will, so of the intellect: as in life, so in art. The law to which the sonnetteer submits himself, substitutes the restraint of a mechanical limitation for restraint by effort of the judgment; and the 'steed of the pen,' to borrow from a Persian metaphor, is enclosed, and cannot 'get loose upon the plain of prolixity.' The fence is, to a certain extent, a substitute for the bridle.

We must not quit the subject of this sonnet without adverting to some passages in Mr. Wordsworth's other works, which have a bearing upon the same doctrine.

In the ode entitled 'The Pass of Kirkstone' (which we wish it were our business to quote at length), the poet having by a toilsome ascent and somewhat against his inclination reached that pass, describes the scene which presents itself, and addresses the road by which he had gained the summit of the mountain: —

'Aspiring road! that lov'st to hide
Thy daring in a vapoury bourn,
Not seldom may the hour return
When thou shalt be my guide;
And I (as often we find cause
When life is at a weary pause
And we have panted up the hill
Of duty with reluctant will)
Be thankful, even tho' tired and faint,
For the rich bounties of constraint;
Whence oft invigorating transports flow
That choice lack'd courage to bestow!'

In other poems Mr. Wordsworth seems to have had in view the difficult question, whether there may not be some individuals, to whom, by a rare purity of moral constitution, Nature herself may afford a restraint adequate for the government of a life led under the influence of natural objects and a natural piety:—

'Three years she grew in sun and shower;
Then Nature said, "A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A lady of my own.

Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me

44963

> The girl, in rock and plain,
> In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
> Shall feel an overseeing power,
> To kindle or restrain." '

In the ode to Duty again, he speaks in the same sense as in the sonnet—

> 'Me this unchartered freedom tires,
> I feel the weight of chance desires.'

But the spirit of a moral liberty as growing out of the spirit of duty or tempered by it, is, in truth, the subject of the whole of this ode, and we request the reader to refresh his remembrance of it in connexion with the sonnet last quoted.

There are other passages in Mr. Wordsworth's works more or less bearing upon the subject; but we have quoted enough to exemplify the manner in which we would recommend that the doctrinal class of Mr. Wordsworth's sonnets should be studied —by the light, that is, of his works at large and of the moral views which pervade them.

'Is Mr. Wordsworth, then,' it may be asked,

'so prone to repeat himself?' We answer, undoubtedly he is; and we will venture to add that self-repetition is almost invariably incident to men of genius, and constitutes a great element of their power. The difference between such men and others is not only in the importance of the truths which occur to them, but in the impression which a truth makes. A great truth coming into the mind of a great man lives with him from that time forth, mixes itself with his thoughts in all moods of his mind, reproduces itself in many combinations, passes from him in sundry shapes, and according as his own mind is multiform and cognizant of many varieties of mind and mood in others, this truth proceeding from it thus repeatedly and variously, finds access to one reader in the shape of a passage in an ethical poem, to another in that of a sonnet—to one in a form in which he can comprehend it in its entire scope and extent, to another, or to the same in another mood, in a form in which he can remember and quote it. The same truth may have

entered a thousand minds before, but the ordinary mind grew tired of it and dismissed it, whilst to the other its value as a truth is more than its novelty as a thought, and gives it an eternal freshness. It has been our good fortune to have listened to the conversation of most of the great writers of the present age, and we have observed that they all repeated themselves more than other men, and that this did in no respect detract from the interest of their discourse, but rather enhanced it, as what recurred often was what we most wished to dwell upon.

If, as we have seen, Mr. Wordsworth insists much upon self-government as the condition of moral freedom, not less sedulous is he to inculcate that the controul of the passions is indispensable to freedom of the intellect and imagination; and on that ground he rests the following exhortation to temperance in grief:—

'From the dark chambers of dejection freed,
Spurning the unprofitable yoke of care,
Rise, GILLIES, rise: the gales of youth shall bear
Thy genius forward like a winged steed.

Though bold Bellerophon (so Jove decreed
In wrath) fell headlong from the fields of air,
Yet a rich guerdon waits on minds that dare,
If aught be in them of immortal seed,
And reason govern that audacious flight
Which heavenward they direct.—Then droop not thou,
Erroneously renewing a sad vow
In the low dell 'mid Roslin's faded grove:
A cheerful life is what the Muses love,
A soaring spirit is their prime delight.'

To a mind of high intellectual aspirations, there is perhaps no earthly motive for conquering a sorrow so likely to be effective as that which is here suggested; for though earthly, it is not worldly; on the contrary, it harmonizes with a state of the feelings in which worldly pursuits are set aside. But we advert to it chiefly for the sake of placing the view expressed in the last two lines, in opposition to a belief almost universal in the zenith of Lord Byron's reputation and still somewhat prevalent, that a melancholy temperament is favourable to poetic genius; a belief from which the practical consequence followed that in our time, as in the days of Prince Arthur—

'Young gentlemen would be as sad as night
Only for wantonness.'

We do not deny that a poetical mind will have its melancholy moods and seasons, and we would even admit that a pensive melancholy, as an occasional mood, may be more frequent with such a mind than with others. In these very sonnets of Mr. Wordsworth's, there is a strain of melancholy feeling to be met with in many a page: but Mr. Wordsworth's melancholy is not that of a languid self-occupied recluse; it is a melancholy which alternates with the spirit of enjoyment and carries with it the spirit of consolation, and is penetrating and rational,—'a melancholy compounded of many simples and the sundry contemplation of his travels.' We speak *of* Mr. Wordsworth therefore, as well as with him, when we say that a mind which is strong and elastic in its general texture, is as propitious to the highest order of poetic genius as to any other agency which is to be powerful over mankind. The reveries of a fantastic sadness or of a gloomy seclusion

can yield but a meagre product in poetry, as compared with the meditations of a mind which is not only contemplative but vigorous and buoyant, and above all, active in its social sympathies. For the highest poetry must be founded in knowledge and wisdom, and informed by a spirit which, though clear and pure, is conversant with the ways of men, observant of their passions and transactions, and interested in all that concerns them. It is true that nothing can be more unpoetical than a strong and vivacious spirit which is also hard and selfish; and true also that this may be the more common combination: but it is the *un*common combination of great susceptibility and tenderness with not less of strength and vivacity, which makes the truly poetical temperament. And with regard to sympathy for suffering, though it is often supposed to belong more peculiarly to those who suffer in themselves, yet we are to distinguish between the occasional sufferings of a strong spirit bending but not broken, and the absolute subjection of the mind to

suffering as a permanent state. In the former case the recollection of past sufferings is keen enough to quicken the sympathies, whilst there is nothing to abate the courage or the genial freshness of the heart. In the latter, after the suffering has been for a long time unmixed and unintermitting, there will be hardly anything left alive in the heart except the desire to escape from pain; and if the sympathy with pain be not deadened (which it probably will be in the general prostration and self-involvement of the feelings), then there will be the desire to escape from that also. And here we must again bring the 'Excursion' to our assistance:—

'Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,
His heart lay open; and by Nature tuned
And constant disposition of his thoughts
To sympathy with man, he was alive
To all that was enjoyed where'er he went,
And all that was endured; for in himself
Happy, and quiet in his cheerfulness,
He had no painful pressure from without,
That made him turn aside from wretchedness
With coward fears. He could *afford* to suffer
With those whom he saw suffer. Hence it came

That in our best experience he was rich
And in the wisdom of our daily life.'

Thus, to resume the sonnet, it is not from grief that the poet's friend is exhorted to free himself,—not from grief the natural tribute to calamity,—but from dejection and darkness, and as their necessary consequent, 'the unprofitable yoke of care.' For let no man suppose that he can surrender himself to an undue and interminable sorrow without becoming the slave of petty, fretful, miserable cares. To put on perpetual mourning is to put on the livery of a very abject servitude. And again the exhortation is addressed, not to one who was subjugated by some constitutional weakness or malady conspiring with circumstances to make sorrow immedicable —for to such a man exhortation would be addressed in vain—but to one whose despondency was in some measure wilful,—a mistaken man who was voluntarily devoting himself to sorrow, and whom to enlighten might be to reanimate; for that such was the case in question is clearly intimated in

those two lines (so exquisitely musical) which precede the close of the sonnet—

> 'Droop not thou,
> Erroneously renewing a sad vow
> In the low dell 'mid Roslin's faded grove.'

The principal aim of the sonnet having been this exhortation to the exercise of intellectual powers, the rewards and conditions of true genius are noticed incidentally. The rewards are promised to 'minds that dare:' but the courage is not to be that of temperament—for such courage is rash and presumptuous, and can expect only the rebuke of Bellerophon who fell headlong. It is to be a courage founded in faith and fortified by the judgment —intellectual, spiritual, reasonable—such as shall be attendant upon endeavours directed towards the highest objects: for when is it that a rich guerdon waits on minds that dare?—Only

> 'If aught be in them of immortal seed,
> And reason govern that audacious flight
> Which heavenward they direct.'

It is to the intrepidity of high and sacred

thoughts and a genuine inspiration, that rewards are promised, and amongst them that restoration for an afflicted spirit which is not to be found in permanent seclusion, but only in the consecrating of active life to nobler purposes. And how much more is to be expected from an appeal like this, than from the exhortations to patience and fortitude which are so often employed with so little effect!

> 'Consolatories writ,
> With studied argument,
> Extolling patience as the truest fortitude,'*

do not produce the patience they extol, precisely because they extol it to this false extent. For excellent and commendable though it be, there are few cases of affliction in which, so soon as the earliest stage is past, something better than patience may not be looked to with better hope, and patience be met with by the way. Active energies, high aspirations must be awakened; the resiliency of the heart must be called upon rather than its passive

* Sampson Agonistes.

strength;—and oftentimes when the admonition to be patient would do little else than impose silence upon grief, such exhortations as are contained in this sonnet (and at greater length in the Fourth Book of the 'Excursion') may—not in poetry merely, but in practice and in very deed, be found full of consolation —animating, exalting, invigorating, and

> 'able to drive
> All sadness but despair.'

This sonnet was addressed to a man of poetical talents who had the world before him and the 'gales of youth' to bear him forward. Let us turn now to a tribute rendered in the same form to a great man whose career was rapidly drawing to a close. In the autumn of 1831 Mr. Wordsworth paid a visit to Sir Walter Scott, at Abbotsford, a few days before Sir Walter's departure for Naples; and that departure became the subject of a sonnet, which we are desirous to quote—not for the purposes of criticism, for indeed it needs no comment—but because the grace, and melody, and tenderness by which it is characterised,

will say more to some readers than Mr. Wordsworth's abstruser inspirations:—

'A trouble, not of clouds or weeping rain,
Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light,
Engendered, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height:
Spirits of Power, assembled there, complain
For kindred Power departing from their sight;
While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
Saddens his voice again, and yet again.
Lift up your hearts, ye mourners! for the might
Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes;
Blessings and prayers in nobler retinue
Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows,
Follow this wondrous potentate. Be true,
Ye winds of ocean and the midland sea,
Wafting your charge to soft Parthenope!'

Let it be written in the literary annals of this age at least, if not of others, that the men who were greatest in intellect amongst us were also great in heart and spirit, and lived together delighting in each other's society and rejoicing in each other's fame. Nor was it the fellowship of a 'school' which united them. This has been supposed of Mr. Wordsworth, Mr. Coleridge, and Mr. Southey, though never of Sir Walter Scott; and yet it could scarcely have been more absurd to class him with them

as forming a school, than to class them with each other. The truth is that these four men came together merely because they were the men of the greatest literary genius in their generation, and because, being also men of large natures, any spirit of rivalry or jealousy was utterly foreign to their dispositions. Such men could not but be congenial associates, not owing to any peculiarity of genius common to them or any of them, but in spite of very great diversity. Mr. Wordsworth and Mr. Coleridge are the two in whom most points of resemblance might be discerned, the genius of both being essentially philosophic; and yet how wide is the difference!—the one living, amongst books and amongst the wonderful creations of his own mind, a life of thinking for thinking's sake, led by the infirmities of his constitution to turn away from realities,

> 'And haply by abstruse research to steal
> From his own nature all the natural man'*—

* Coleridge's 'Ode to Dejection.' One of the few profound writers of the present day has described with singular force and truth the intellectual characteristics of which this extraordinary man afforded (as we conceive) an example—an example illustrious,

dealing therefore with thoughts untried in action, unverified by application, perpetual

no doubt, and wonderful, but to our minds not less melancholy :— 'But the imagination is not the only interceptor of affections divinely destined to the purposes of action. The understanding may be excited simultaneously, and when set to work in reasoning upon the relations of any given phenomena, or upon reducing them into a system, it may thus, with speculative truth for its end, be so delighted with its own energies as to lead us into forgetfulness of action. Thus it absorbs in intellectual exercise the strength that ought to have been spent in practical exertion; and, while it seems to be doing the work of the affections, it diverts them from their own end, employing all the mental powers in the verification of terms instead of the execution of acts, and then applying them to its own work of classifying, comparing, concluding, or otherwise as the case may be. Thus again, when a religious creed is presented, say to a disputatious and subtle mind, in which the action of the critical faculty overbears and absorbs all other energies, that faculty regards the creed proposed polemically, considers it with reference to logical and technical precision, and not in respect to its moral characteristics and tendencies, and wastes upon this theoretic handling of sacred themes all the sedulity which ought to be employed in seeking to give effect to the proffered means of spiritual amelioration.'— 'Gladstone's Church Principles,' p. 67.

So far the Note to the article as originally printed in 1841. But it is proper to add now (in 1848), that the view of Mr. Coleridge here taken, has provoked a protest from a writer of the highest authority on that, as indeed on every other topic of which she treats. Mr. Coleridge's daughter, Mrs. H. N. Coleridge, in a dissertation for its depth and clearness unrivalled, which she has prefixed to a new Edition of her father's 'Biographia Literaria,' has expressed herself as follows :—'All this may be true enough of the mere intellectualist; but who that

evolutions of the thinking faculty which revolved into themselves, and which, though

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was well acquainted with Coleridge, as an author or as a man, could suppose that such was his character, or speak of views like his as the product of understanding unirradiated by reason and fancy uninspired by the spiritual sense? Of all men in the present age he was among the first and ever among the most earnest to maintain, that "religion must have a moral origin, so far at least that the evidence of its doctrines cannot, like the truths of abstract science, be wholly independent of the will:" that "religion is designed to improve the nature and faculties of man, and that every part of religion is to be judged by its relation to this main end." These maxims he insisted on during his whole course as a religious writer; they plainly had a deep hold on his mind, and were uttered by him, not with the lip only, as if learned from others, but as if they had indeed been drawn from "the fountain-head of genuine self-research." If he then tried a religious creed "with reference to logical and technical precision, and *not in respect to its moral characteristics and tendencies*," how strangely must he have deserted a principle which his own experience had established!—how unaccountably shut his eyes to the light of a "safety lamp," which his own hands had hung up for the guidance of others! Let any candid reader consult on this subject the 'Aids to Reflection,' especially that portion in which the author maintains, that "revealed truths are to be judged of by us, as far as they are grounds of practice, or in some way connected with our moral and spiritual interests,"—that "the life, the substance, the hope, the love, in one word, the faith,—these are derivatives from the practical, moral and spiritual nature and being of man;" and then ask himself whether he who wrote thus could be capable of falling into the error described above. And again let him see whether he can cite a single passage from his writings in which he appears to be trying a creed according to logical precision alone, without regard to its

governed by the curb of a severe logic, were not encountered by the checks and responsi-

deeper bearings. So far from being apt to consider articles of belief exclusively in their intellectual aspect, in his departures from received orthodoxy he was chiefly influenced by moral considerations, by his sense of the discrepancy betwixt the tenet, in its ordinary form, and the teachings of conscience,—his conviction that the doctrine, as commonly understood, either meant nothing or something which opposed the spiritual sense and practical reason. The *mere intellectualists*, who try divine things by human measures, had in my father a life-long opponent. Why then is a charge of mere intellectualism brought against himself? Is it because he resisted the insidious sophism which splits the complex being of man; separates the moral in his nature from the rational, the spiritual from conscience and reason; thrusts aside the understanding from its necessary office of organizing and evolving the whole mind, and thus brings half truth and confusion into every department of thought? Did he shew himself unspiritual in declaring that superstition is not, as some will have it, a debased form of *faith*, but a disguised infidelity, since men become superstitious inasmuch as they are "sensuous and dark, slaves by their own compulsion;" or heartless because he refused to establish faith on feeling and fancy, apart from reflection, and to adopt the slavish maxim, that forms of doctrine which have been associated with religious ideas are to be received implicitly, —are not to be examined whether they stifle the truth or convey it rightly? No! it is not from a strict and careful examination of his *writings* that these notions have arisen, but from a partial view of his *life* and its bearing upon his character.[e] It has been thought that he led too exclusively a life of contemplation to be thoroughly well qualified for a moral preceptor, that he dwelt too much on the speculative side of philosophy to have, in fullest measure, a true philosopher's wisdom. It has been affirmed that he dealt with "thoughts untried in action, unverified by appli-

bilities of life—the other seeking rather the wisdom of philosophy than philosophy in

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cation, mere exercises of the thinking faculty revolving into itself:" that he "lived a life of thinking for thinking's sake." I cannot admit that this is true. Whether or no it would have been better for Mr. Coleridge's own mind and character had he exercised a regular profession, and been less withdrawn from family cares, it is not for me to determine: but this I can affirm, that to represent him as having spent a life of inaction, or of thinking without reference to practical ends, is an injustice both to him and to the products of his mind. To write and to think were his chief business in life; contemplation was the calling to which his Maker called him; but to *think merely for thinking's sake*,—merely for the excitement and pastime of the game, is no man's calling; it is an occupation utterly unworthy of a rational and immortal being. Whether or no he deserves such a judgment let men determine by a careful survey of his writings; in connection with all those studies which are necessary in order to make them understood; let them pronounce upon his character afterwards; perhaps they will see it with different eyes, and with clearer ones when they have finished the course. I cannot of course attempt here to vindicate his claim to some "gift of genuine insight," as an ethical writer; but in reference to the remarks lately cited I ask, of what sort are the thoughts dealt with in 'The Friend,' the 'Aids to Reflection,' the 'Lay Sermons,' the 'Church and State,' the 'Literary Remains?' May it not be said that, of the thoughts they contain, one large class, that relating to politics, cannot, by their nature, "*issue out of acts*,"—out of the particular acts of an individual life,—or be tried and applied in action by the individual who treats of them, though they *tend* to acts and are to have practical consequences; seeing that they relate to national movements, interests of bodies, dealings of communities; while another still larger class, which concern the moral and spiritual being of man, are capable of being tried and verified in the life of

itself, drawing from the well-spring of life and fact, to which books afforded merely tributary streams, acting as occasions arose or giving or seeking advice as to what was to be done when this or that happened, living apart from that world which sees its own reflection in the newspapers, but for that very reason penetrating further into individual natures and transactions—

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every Christian, whether he be given to outward action, or whether activities of an inward character, have been his chief occupation upon earth? To deny their author *this* practical knowledge and experience would be a satire on his personal character rather than a review of his philosophic mind. All the poetry, all the poetical criticism which my father produced has a practical end; for poetry is a visible creation, the final aim of which is to benefit man by means of delight. As for his moral and religious writings, if practical wisdom is not in them, they are empty indeed, for their whole aim is practical usefulness—the regulation of action, the actions of the heart and mind with their appropriate manifestations—the furtherance of man's well being here and hereafter. This remark, that my father lived a life of thinking for thinking's sake is either the severest of judgments, more severe than his worst and most prejudiced enemies ever passed on him in the heat of conflict, or it is no censure at all, but rather a commendation; inasmuch as the soul is better than the body and mental activity nobler than corporeal.'

I do not doubt that the account thus given of Mr. Coleridge's mind is the more correct of the two, as well as the more authentic.

'Sheltered, but not to social duties lost;
Secluded, but not buried'—*

and exercising his judgment in the only way which tends to its rectification—with the consciousness, namely, that according as it concludes there will follow joy or sorrow, loss or gain, injury, anger and resentment, or love and gratitude, on the part of some friend, neighbour, or well-known individual who is frequently met with face to face. From the judgment so exercised and the knowledge accruing with the exercise, comes practical wisdom, and by duly generalising from practical wisdom we advance to philosophic wisdom. But the principle which lies at the root of all is, that thoughts should either end towards acts or issue out of them, in order to be justly determined.

'Give to no unproportioned thought his act,'†

is a negative injunction, to which may be appended an affirmative and a converse of

* Excursion, Book v.
† Shakspeare, in 'Hamlet.'

equal truth. 'Give to each well-proportioned thought his act' is the affirmative: the converse (if it can be so called) is, 'Give your thoughts their acts, and they will have thereby the better chance to be well proportioned.' For when a thought is to have an act and a consequence, its justness will be the quality principally regarded by the thinker: whereas, if it is to be merely a meditative effort, to end in itself or in another thought, or in being written down in prose or rhyme, its novelty or brilliancy will have a principal instead of a secondary place in the estimation of the thinker; and by the habit of thus thinking without acting, and therefore without fear of consequences, the justness of the judgment will be impaired, and neither practical nor philosophic wisdom will be attained in their highest degrees. Of course we do not mean to say that, for the purposes of a writer, there must not be much thinking which neither begins nor ends in acting, nor perhaps has any *direct* reference to it; but what we do contend for is, that the *habits* of the mind must be

formed by the thinking which has this reference, if there is to be any such 'gift of genuine insight' as may constitute a great ethical writer, whether in prose or poetry.

It is thus to the cultivation of Mr. Wordsworth's mind in real life that we attribute his pre-eminence as a philosophic poet; for with him the justness of the thought is always the first consideration: what is commonplace, so it be but true, has its due place and proportion in his mind; and the degree to which plain and acknowledged truth enters into his writings gives them their breadth, and perhaps, when they are regarded as a whole, even adds to their originality; for there is no mind so rare, nor consequently so original, as one which is intellectually capable of the most brilliant aberrations, and is yet so tempered by the love of truth as to give old truths their place along with new, and so warmed by the same love as to make all truths impressive. And Mr. Wordsworth's example, if not his precepts, may suggest to the poetical aspirants who abound in our times, that poetry, in its

highest kinds, is the result, not merely of a talent or an art, nor even only of these combined with a capacious mind and an ardent imagination, but also of a life led in the love of truth—and if not in action as the word is ordinarily used, yet certainly in giving practical effect to right feelings and just judgments, and in communicating, by conscientiousness in conduct, an habitually conscientious justness to the operations of the reason and the understanding. 'Endeavour thus to live,'—we would say to such aspirants in Mr. Wordsworth's own words—

> 'Endeavour thus to live; these rules regard;
> These helps solicit; and a steadfast seat
> Shall then be yours among the happy few
> Who dwell on earth, yet breathe empyreal air,
> Sons of the morning.' *

The Sonnets, (with the exception of the Ecclesiastical series) bear witness more directly perhaps than any of Mr. Wordsworth's other writings, to a principle which he has asserted of poetical, as strongly as

* Excursion, Book iv.

Lord Bacon of physical philosophy—the principle that the Muse is to be the servant and interpreter of Nature. Some fact, transaction, or natural object, gives birth to almost every one of them. He does not search his mind for subjects; he goes forth into the world and they present themselves. His mind lies open to nature with an ever wakeful susceptibility, and an impulse from without will send it far into the regions of thought; but it seldom goes to work upon itself. It is not celibate, but

> 'wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion'—

Of which union poetry is the legitimate offspring; and it is owing to this love and passion that the most ordinary incidents and objects have inspired an interest in the poet, and that so soon as the impassioned character of his mind had made itself felt and understood, he was enabled to convey the same interest with wonderful success to his readers.

It is true that it was many years before

this success was brought about to the extent of a popular acceptation, and also that to this day there are readers to whom his poems convey nothing; and we have to acknowledge that amongst this number, rapidly diminishing as it is, there are still some men of distinguished abilities. It is not difficult to account for the general neglect of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry during the first quarter of the present century. That was a period when the poetry of reflection was so much out of fashion that verse had almost ceased to be regarded as a vehicle for thought, and even thoughtful men had recourse to it as if the very intention were to divert themselves from thinking—hung over a stitched pamphlet of rhyme with the sort of charmed ear with which they would have listened to a first-rate performer at the Opera—waited impatiently for another stitched pamphlet to come upon the stage three months afterwards—and being hurried away by their enthusiasm as one stitched pamphlet came

out after another, almost mistook the 'primi cantatori' in this line for the lights of the age, and their 'lean and flashy songs' for divine illuminations. Such was the bewilderment of those times: nor is it difficult to conceive that some intelligent men, whose intellectual constitution was not strong, may have had their taste so vitiated during the prevalence of this fashion as never to have recovered a natural appetite. But there are men of a very different order from these, who are still unconverted, and whose case it is not so easy to understand—men too robust in their frame of mind to have been debilitated by the errors of youth, too free and generous in their temper to feel bound by past commitments, and who nevertheless do in all sincerity fail to make anything out from Mr. Wordsworth's poetry.

Had the value of the poetry consisted in some peculiar vein of fancy, had it been a matter of versification, or had it resolved itself into a particular strain of sentiment or opinion, we should have said—'This is not for the

universal ear; it will naturally hit some minds and miss others;' and of many of Mr. Wordsworth's poems this may be said fairly; and we know very well that some of those which make the strongest impression on one reader will make none whatever upon another. But when we look to the main body of Mr. Wordsworth's works, and perceive that they are addressed to the mind of man at large, and that with a great variety of manner and verse they deal for the most part with matters of universal interest, we do feel at a loss to explain the existence of that remnant of intellectual men who are still inaccessible. We should have thought that, verse and all embellishment apart, when one considerable understanding was brought to bear upon another, in subject-matter to which all understandings apply themselves, nothing but the curse of Cassandra could have prevented some result from being obtained. So it is, however; and it is chiefly for the sake of meeting this remnant on what appears to us to be the

best ground, that we have undertaken to review the 'Sonnets;'—meeting them,—not in the spirit of 'compelling them to come in,' but for a fair trial whether it be not possible to get rid of such an intellectual anomaly as their standing out seems to us to be, and to bring together minds which are worthy of each other. And we imagine that the Sonnets may answer this purpose best: they have not, like many of the other poems, peculiarities of manner which whilst they charm one reader will baulk another; they are highly-finished compositions, distinguished, as regards the diction, only by an aptitude which can hardly fail to be approved, whatever may be the particular taste of the reader; and they are at the same time so varied in subject and sentiment, that specimens might be adduced from them of almost every kind of serious poetry to which the sonnet can lend itself.

We have quoted hitherto one sonnet in art, two that are doctrinal, and one which may be called occasional. The majority of the

four hundred and forty-four which have been published are of a mixed character, in which the doctrinal predominates; it is on these principally that we should wish to dwell, and we shall revert to them presently: but in the mean time, we will make room for some of lighter kinds; and first for two which are linked together in the series on the River Duddon—the former of them descriptive, the latter pastoral—both (as usual) suggested by a natural object—the stepping-stones in a stream—and both connecting it with the circumstances of human life which are incident to it:—

'The struggling rill insensibly is grown
Into a brook of loud and stately march,
Crossed ever and anon by plank or arch;
And, for like use, lo! what might seem a zone
Chosen for ornament—stone matched with stone
In studied symmetry, with interspace
For the clear waters to pursue their race
Without restraint. How swiftly have they flown,
Succeeding—still succeeding! Here the child
Puts, when the high-swollen flood runs fierce and wild,
His budding courage to the proof; and here
Declining manhood learns to note the sly

And sure encroachments of infirmity,
Thinking how fast time runs, life's end how near!

Not so that pair whose youthful spirits dance
With prompt emotion, urging them to pass;
A sweet confusion checks the shepherd-lass;
Blushing she eyes the dizzy flood askance,
To stop ashamed—too timid to advance;
She ventures once again—another pause!
His outstretched hand he tauntingly withdraws—
She sues for help with piteous utterance!
Chidden, she chides again; the thrilling touch
Both feel, when he renews the wished-for aid:
Ah! if their fluttering hearts should stir too much,
Should beat too strongly, both may be betrayed.
The frolic Loves, who from yon high rock see
The struggle, clap their wings for victory!'

This series on the River Duddon is a register of the thoughts which may be suggested to a poet in tracking this stream from its source in the mountains to its junction with the sea. We have seen what may occur when it flows in human society, and Childhood, Youth, and Age step across it. But there is a previous stage of its course in which it flows through a remote and untrodden solitude, and then everything that is to be seen being what it had been from

time immemorial, the poet's fancy is carried far back into the past:—

'What aspect bore the man who roved or fled,
First of his tribe, to this dark dell? who first
In this pellucid current slaked his thirst?
What hopes came with him? what designs were spread
Along his path? His unprotected bed
What dreams encompassed? Was the intruder nursed
In hideous usages and rites accursed
That thinned the living and disturbed the dead?
No voice replies; both air and earth are mute;
And thou, blue streamlet, murmuring yield'st no more
Than a soft record, that whatever fruit
Of ignorance thou might'st witness heretofore,
Thy function was to heal and to restore,
To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!'

How simple and yet how full is the diction of this sonnet! How much of the wildness and insecurity of savage life is in those words 'roved or fled,' and in the presentation to the fancy of the one sole man wandering or fugitive! Then the darkness and cruelty of Druidical superstition and barbarian warfare are alluded to in a tone of almost fearful inquiry; and after the pause of silence in the ninth line, how beautifully and with what an expressive change of the music is

the mind turned to the perennial influences of Nature, as healing, soothing, and restorative in all times, whatever be the condition of Man! This sonnet is a study in versification throughout, and observe especially the use of duplicate, triplicate, and even quadruplicate consonants in our language,—how admirably they may be made to serve the purposes of rhythmical melody which they are often supposed to thwart—

'And thou, blue streamlet, murmuring yie*ld'st* no more,' &c.

How the slight check, delay, and resistance of the fourfold consonant makes the flow of the verse to be still more musically felt! The Northern languages have often been reproached for their excess in consonants, guttural, sibillant, or mute, and it has been concluded, as a matter of course, that languages in which vowels and liquids predominate must be better adapted to poetry, and that the most mellifluous language must be also the most melodious. We must be allowed to think, however, that this is but a

rash and ill-considered condemnation of our native tongue. Poetry has been often compared to embroidery, and when a language is all of one texture, and that texture nothing but silk and satin, the skilful hand will have but little advantage, and the workmanship of finer art will not stand out so distinctly from ordinary fabrics. Nor indeed will such a language supply adequate materials to the hand of art. In dramatic verse more particularly, our English combinations of consonants are invaluable, not only for the purpose of reflecting grace and softness by contrast, or accelerating the verse by a momentary detention, but also in giving expression to the harsher passions, and in imparting keenness and significancy to the language of discrimination, and especially to that of scorn. In Shakspeare, for instance, what a blast of sarcasm whistles through that word, '*Thrift, Thrift,* Horatio!' with its one vowel and five consonants, and then how the verse runs on with a low confidential smoothness, as if to give

effect to the outbreak by the subsequent suppression—

> ———' the funeral baked meats
> Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.'

We are not, be it observed, insisting, as some philologists have done of late years, on a preference for the Saxon element of our language as affording a purer and better English than any other; on the contrary, we hold that English is essentially a highly composite language; that it derives its force, as well as its richness, from the great variety and diversity of its constituents, and that it will be best written by him who avails himself of all its elements in their natural proportion, tempering one with another. And when we say their *natural* proportion, we mean that which comes naturally to the individual writer; for, after all, art and instruction can do little more in this matter than to remove theories of style out of the way, and leave a writer to his own intuitive ear and perceptions to find him the better or worse style which is suitable to him.

Mr. Wordsworth's diction appears to us to be neither Saxon nor Latin particularly, but abounding in all the treasures of our vocabulary, and making the music which no man can make who has but one string to his fiddle.

To return to the Sonnets.—'What is a spinning-wheel?' is a question which may now be asked by a full-grown person who cannot recollect to have seen one; and it might be answered by a person twenty years older, that in his youth such an implement was seen in every cottage and in many houses of somewhat higher pretensions—that it was a wheel mounted two or three feet above the ground, to which the spinner's foot, by means of a sort of pedal, communicated a uniform rotatory motion, whilst her fingers were busy in manipulating the line of flax drawn from it,—that the motion was just not so rapid but that it could be distinctly discerned by the eye, and that the sound which accompanied it was something between the humming of a top and the

purring of a cat. But if, having explained the mechanism of the spinning-wheel and its direct use and purpose, he were asked to give some account of its moral influences, he might require the aid of the poet:—

'Grief, thou hast lost an ever-ready friend
Now that the cottage spinning-wheel is mute;
And Care—a comforter that best could suit
Her froward mood, and softliest reprehend;
And Love—a charmer's voice, that used to lend,
More efficaciously than aught that flows
From harp or lute, kind influence to compose
The throbbing pulse—else troubled without end:
Even Joy could tell, Joy craving truce and rest
From her own overflow, what power sedate
On those revolving motions did await
Assiduously—to soothe her aching breast,
And, to a point of just relief, abate
The mantling triumphs of a day too blest.'

Mechanical employment, even without these peculiar charms of the spinning-wheel, has no doubt a tendency to alleviate suffering and subdue excitability, and this truth has a political as well as a moral bearing; for in seasons of commercial or agricultural difficulty, the political disturbances which arise amongst the lower orders of the people

may be attributed, not to distress and destitution only—for it has often been observed that they extend to many who are under no immediate pressure of want—but also to the concurrent deprivation of that great sedative to the human mind which is found in the employment of the body. Neither hunger nor full feeding act alike upon all men—the one will not invariably produce irritability, still less will the other be unfailingly attended with contentment—but steady labour or manual employment will always promote composure of mind. And this may add one more to the many considerations which lead the politician, as well as the moralist, to insist that a high rate of wages is less to be desired for a country, than work which is regular even though ill paid.

But whilst Mr. Wordsworth appreciates the moral influence of mechanical labour in abating excitement to '*a point of just relief*,' we might refer to many passages in the 'Excursion' to show that its benefits become more than questionable in his eyes, when it

is carried so far as to suppress the activity of the understanding and render the mind callous and insensible. We have not room for quotations; nor need we multiply references; but the subject is discussed at length in the eighth book, with no pseudo-poetical partiality—no preference of previous and ancient evils to those of the manufacturing system, but philosophically and fairly; and it is resumed in the ninth book in its natural connexion with the subject of national education. If reference be made to these two books, it will be seen by those who are practically acquainted with the subject, that the experience and parliamentary inquiries of the seven-and-twenty years which have elapsed since the 'Excursion' was published have only shown more conclusively the justness of the poet's views and feelings as to the evils which are, perhaps to a certain extent unavoidably, but at all events most unhappily and fatally to many of the lower classes, mixed up with the unsteady and inordinate activities of our manufacturing

system. In the course of those years other eminent writers joined in denouncing these evils with all the fervour of the poetical temperament (one great man, Mr. Southey, we need scarcely name), and more recently public men have been found in the House of Commons, of an ardent and indefatigable benevolence, to suggest remedies; whilst there has remained for political economists the ungracious but indispensable task of determining which of these were practicable and which were not. Some progress—much, we trust—has been made in the matter; and by a kindly alliance and concurrence of all the lights and powers which are requisite for the treatment of this difficult problem—by philanthropical, philosophical, economical and practical efforts, and by eloquence poetical and parliamentary, and by the press and by the pulpit, it may be hoped that much more progress will be made in no long time.

We turn to the series of sonnets 'dedicated to Liberty,' with peculiar interest. They

were so entitled in early editions, though in later they are included with others under the title of 'Political Sonnets.' They are, for the most part, suggested by public occurrences which took place within the eventful and instructive period of the history of liberty extending from the French Revolution to the battle of Waterloo; with some few upon subjects belonging to remoter times. They should be read along with those passages in the third book of the 'Excursion,' wherein the Solitary comments on the rise and progress of the French Revolution, and with an admirable ode on the same subject, which may be best referred to by quoting the first stanza:—

"Who rises on the banks of Seine,
And binds her temples with the civic wreath;
What joy to read the promise of her mien!
How sweet to rest her wide-spread wings beneath!
But they are ever playing,
Aud twinkling in the light,
And if a breeze be staying,
That breeze she will invite;
And stands on tiptoe, conscious she is fair,
And calls a look of love into her face,
And spreads her arms, as if the general air
Alone could satisfy her wide embrace.

—Melt, Principalities, before her melt!
Her love ye hailed—her wrath have felt!
But she through many a change of form has gone,
And stands amidst you now an arméd creature,
Whose panoply is not a thing put on,
But the live scales of a portentous nature;
That having forced its way from birth to birth,
Stalks round—abhorred by heaven, a terror to the earth!"

In this ode, in the third Book of the Excursion, and in others of his poems, too numerous and scattered to be specifically mentioned, will be found Mr. Wordsworth's sentiments respecting liberty in the various senses in which the word is used, as applying to national independence, to civil liberty, and to individual freedom; and it will appear that his sentiments are everywhere pervaded by a deep sense of the truth that liberty is essentially of a moral and spiritual nature, and that however closely connected with political forms and organizations, and dictating and requiring them for her conservation, yet that these forms do not constitute, and cannot of themselves impart, the spirit of liberty—that the forms must result from the spirit, otherwise the spirit will not result from the forms

—a doctrine which has a constant application to practical politics. A celebrated event in ancient history is made the occasion of delivering this doctrine in reference both to civil liberty and national independence :—

'A Roman Master stands on Grecian ground;
And to the people at the Isthmian games
Assembled, he, by a herald's voice, proclaims
THE LIBERTY OF GREECE :—the words rebound
Until all voices in one voice are drowned;
Glad acclamation by which air is rent!
And birds, high flying in the element,
Drop to the earth, astonished at the sound!
Yet were the thoughtful grieved; and still that voice
Haunts, with sad echoes, musing Fancy's ear;
Ah! that a *Conqueror's* words should be so dear!
Ah! that a *boon* should shed such rapturous joys!
A gift of that which is not to be given
By all the blended powers of Earth and Heaven.'

Again, in a sonnet written when Bonaparte was threatening the independence of this country, the poet, being at that time on the coast near Dover, contemplates the 'span of waters,' which divides England from France, and admitting the mighty power of the physical barrier, yet regards it as merely subordinate and instrumental, and still insists

upon the higher agency as the vital protection:—

'Even so doth God protect us if we be
Virtuous and wise. Winds blow and waters roll,
Strength to the brave, and Power, and Deity;
Yet in themselves are nothing! One decree
Spake laws to *them*, and said that by the soul
Only, the nations shall be great and free.'

The same strain of sentiment will be found to recur repeatedly in the sonnets which relate to the events of Bonaparte's wars and the subjugation or resistance of the several states whose independence he invaded; and at the close of the series, which ends in 1811, a censure is pronounced upon a deplorable infirmity of man's nature which at that time came in aid of Bonaparte's power, sapping the hearts of many weak brethren in this country as well as in his own and others,—the tendency to lose all sense of right and wrong, and all sense of horror at cruelties and crimes, in an effeminate admiration of talents, achievements, and power. This admiration, thus counteracting the heart's better nature, was in truth,

wheresoever it prevailed, an index of the absence or decay of the virtues which are essential to liberty. We have said an *effeminate* admiration; for it prevailed, we believe, chiefly amongst women, who are more prone than men to feel, concerning things at a distance, according to their effect in story, and not according to their reality in life. Casca, in Shakspeare's play, says of the women who forgave Cæsar, that 'if Cæsar had stabbed their mothers they would have done no less.' We would not assert so much of the admirers of Bonaparte, whether women or effeminate men. Facts which are brought before the bodily eyes or come home to the individual feelings of such persons, will set them right in their sentiments concerning an ambitious conqueror;—the women of Zaragoza were under no mistake;—but that nothing else may have power to do so, there was many a pitiable proof in this country during Bonaparte's career, and to such cases the latter part of the following sonnet adverts, in the strongest language of reprehension

which we recollect to have met with in Mr. Wordsworth's writings:—

'Here pause: the poet claims at least this praise,
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope
In the worst moment of these evil days;
From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.
Never may from our souls one truth depart—
That an accursed thing it is to gaze
On prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye;
Nor—touched with due abhorrence of *their* guilt
For whose dire ends tears flow and blood is spilt
And justice labours in extremity—
Forget thy weakness, upon which is built,
O wretched man, the throne of tyranny!'

The corollary from this sonnet is, that when the admiration of anything opposed to virtue is stronger than virtue itself in a people, that people is unfit for liberty, and the vital spirit of liberty is not in them. Through how much of political theory and practice ought this doctrine to be carried! Is there in this country any constituency to which what are called popular talents will recommend a representative notoriously profligate and reprobate? That constituency is

unfit for its franchise; and whatever specious pretences may be made of supporting a public principle, and distinguishing between public and private conduct—as if the support of virtue was *not* a public principle—such an exercise of the franchise is tainting the very sources of liberty in the land. For to suppose that liberty can be promoted whilst virtue is overlooked, is nothing else than to suppose that the consequence can be produced without having regard to the cause.

That liberty must rest upon a moral rather than a political basis, and that the attempt is vain to push it forward by merely political impulses, is a truth which has always been before the eyes of our great poets, though often lost to those of our politicians. Coleridge saw it in his youth, instructed by the events that were occurring in France, and expressed it with characteristic force:—

> 'The sensual and the dark rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion.' *

Milton saw it, ardently political as he was;

* France, an Ode.

or perhaps he saw it only when the ardour of his political mind had been informed by experience and tempered by adversity. He asks in the 'Paradise Regained' (iv. 145) what wise man would seek to free a people '.by themselves enslaved,'

'Or could of inward slaves make outward free?'

And in the 'Paradise Lost' (xii. 79) Michael explains to Adam that perfect liberty could only exist in paradise, being inseparable from virtue, which again is identical with right reason. These great men knew the nature of liberty; and those who may study, along with their writings, Mr. Wordsworth's political sonnets and the large portion of his other works which bear upon the state and prospects of society, can hardly fail to increase and refresh their knowledge of these subjects, and to appreciate more justly the connexion between true liberty and the mere political outworks which often take its name, without by any means comprising its substance.

For in what does the worth and gloriousness of liberty consist? Not in charters,

statutes, and franchises: these are merely the documents and conveyances of liberty. Not in the political powers and functions which they authenticate: these, indeed, may constitute liberty *as a means;* but the end and sanctifying principle of liberty consists in the peace and happiness, the independence and elevation of the minds of individual men. Let us pursue the principle, therefore, into practical life, and observe how far political institutions succeed, and wherein they fail, to produce personal independence. Take, for instance, an Austrian or Prussian tradesman, and place him side by side with the London shopkeeper, obsequious behind his counter—which is the free man? The Austrian or Prussian will generally be found to wear a countenance and manner of independent courtesy, confident of meeting the same in return, but not much more bent upon conciliating his customer than he expects his customer to be on conciliating him. The relations between them are marked by no other desire to please on the part of the

tradesman, than belongs to the goodwill which ought to subsist between fellow-creatures. True, he is legally liable to be watched by a spy or imprisoned without a warrant; but he lives in no fear that such a thing will happen, and there is no sign that the degradation of his political state enters into his daily feelings, his transactions in business, or his habits in social intercourse. Turn, then, to the London shopkeeper. Of the signs and tokens to be observed in *his* manners we are unwilling to speak. It is enough to say that they are tinctured with a courtesy which is *not* independent. And whence comes this? It is not for want of statutes, charters, privileges, and immunities; it is for want of an independence which these gross instrumentalities can neither give nor take away; it is because his mind has been reached by a far more penetrating influence than any which is thus derived—because his *will* is enslaved; because his heart is venal, and he is ready to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. It is true

that he shouts for liberty at the hustings; but though the voice is Jacob's voice, the hands are the hands of Esau; what he values in what he calls liberty is chiefly protection from a tax; money is still the tyrant of his mind; and the very colours of his political liberty may very often be nothing else than the badge of his inward servitude.

Do we, then, adduce this class, this minority, this mere feature in our society, as impeaching the value of our free institutions in their general results? Far from it. We value those institutions beyond everything except the spirit which produced them and the ends they are to serve. But what we do aim at is to insist, with Mr. Wordsworth, that political liberty is good and glorious only so far as it conduces to moral and spiritual liberty and to personal independence —that it is pure and righteous only in so far as it is

> 'Subservient still to moral purposes,
> Auxiliar to divine.' *

* Excursion, Book iv.

And the practical conclusion is—not that any lover of liberty is to be in any one act or thought of his heart less ardent or strenuous in the love of liberty—but that for the very sake and in the spirit of that love, he is diligently to consider the mixed and contrarious effects to which merely political proceedings give birth; and if he supports measures which are brought forward in the name of political liberty, he is to see at least that they may be expected to promote personal independence, and so far as may be possible, not independence only and of itself, but an independence virtuous, enlightened, and founded in humility.

Having these principles in view, and taking the 8th Book of the 'Excursion' for a connecting commentary, the reader may be led by the Sonnets to trace the course of political liberty through some of its leading consequences in our own country. Its earliest and most assured result is *wealth*. From wealth is derived national power and independence, and a numerous population: but

seeking for its effects within and amongst that population, we find them to be of a chequered and multifarious character, with perhaps only one characteristic common to all, whether good or bad,—that of *activity*. And believing, as it would be impious to disbelieve —believing with a deep trust and assurance that the good elements in human nature are more powerful than the bad and are continually gaining upon them, it follows that an increase of activity to all, will impart an increase of preponderance to the good. Thus wealth and activity, whilst adding largely to the ignorant and bedarkened part of the population, produce a more than proportionate addition to those parts which are in some degree instructed; and have a yet more important result in carrying the instruction of those who were already instructed to a higher point, and along with greater enlightenment, communicating to those classes greater power and efficacy in good works. Hence we have a race of clergymen and country gentlemen far superior to their predecessors.

But whilst we never forget that the results of our institutions are good in the main, and whilst we hope that there will accrue under them an incalculable accession of good in the end, it is fit that we should also look the evil results fairly in the face. Wealth and commercial activity, whilst they make the life of man in general a life of progress, make it also a life of vicissitude as regards worldly condition. By vicissitude the minds of men are exercised in worldly hopes and fears, the passions connected with gain and loss are unduly excited, and the industry of the trading classes (which are perhaps the most important classes as regards the stamp given to the national character) is no longer the industry of necessity or duty, but an inordinate and greedy industry, carrying with it often a taint of gambling speculation, and resembling that vice in its wasting effect upon the heart. This species of industry, if it intermits at all, is of too excited a nature to leave the heart to repose even in its intervals; it may possibly not be altogether

absorbing and engrossing, but in that case the excitement of getting will alternate—not with rest, but with excitement of another kind—the excitement of spending:—

'The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.'*

* The latter part of this sonnet has been misapprehended by some persons, who have supposed that Pagan superstitions were commended absolutely, and not merely as being better than a total absence of devotional and natural sentiment. All that Mr. Wordsworth contends for, is a preference of Triton or Proteus to Mammon. To those who have not considered that in our imperfect natures, the apprehension of religious truth is merely relative, and that superstition may be often by no means the worst of our imperfections, we would recommend the study of some passages in the 21st chapter of 'The Light of Nature and Gospel Lights blended.' An intellect at once more exact and more discursive than that of Abraham Tucker, was never exercised in theology; and his fancy, if not as abundant as

We have borrowed this from the Miscellaneous series; but the next we shall quote is in the same strain, and it was no doubt from seeing a moral slavery in all this, that Mr. Wordsworth placed it in the Political series in the later editions of his works, and in the earlier amongst the 'Sonnets dedicated to Liberty.'

'O thou proud City! which way shall I look
For comfort, being, as I am, opprest,
To think that now our life is only drest
For show; mean handiwork of craftsman, cook,
Or groom?—We must run glittering like a brook
In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:
The wealthiest man among us is the best:

Jeremy Taylor's, is not less aptly and happily illustrative. He warns us against the hasty rooting out of superstition (or what we take to be superstition) wherever it may be found, and at all risks: 'for it is not uncommon that the same plants deserve cultivation in one place, but require weeding out from another. We sow fields of oats with care and cost, but are very sorry to see them among our wheat; the scarlet poppy and sun-resembling marigold, which burn up our corn, are esteemed ornaments in our gardens; the carpet-woven grass that beautifies our lawns must be extirpated from our fallows by frequent and toilsome ploughings. But superstition is not always a distinct plant; it is sometimes like the green leaves of corn, which protect and assist to draw up nourishment into the spire, and will wither away of themselves as that grows towards maturity.'

No grandeur now in nature or in book
Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,
This is idolatry; and these we adore:
Plain living and high thinking are no more:
The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws.'

And in a subsequent sonnet, riches are denounced for the fears which they generate. In October 1803, at the approach of the great conflict with Bonaparte, Mr Wordsworth had remarked that whilst other classes were hopeful and manful, it was the rich who were fearful and desponding:—

'What do we gather hence but firmer faith
That every gift of noble origin
Is breathed upon by Hope's perpetual breath;
That virtue and the faculties within
Are vital,—and that riches are akin
To fear, to change, to cowardice, and death?'

But though Mr. Wordsworth, in these and other Poems, animadverts upon riches or the love of riches as working against the freedom of the heart, he nowhere advocates equality of station as fostering either independence or any other virtue. Yet it may be asked, do

not riches lie at the root of all worldly inequalities? Undoubtedly they do, and riches are as undoubtedly the basis of many social virtues. But in order to be so, they must not be thrown up suddenly by commercial vicissitude; they must be stable and permanent, and give birth to permanent social relations. Riches which are stable and permanent are overgrown in the course of time with many associations and imaginative colourings, until they seem to be rather the adjuncts of a social pre-eminence than the substance and essence of it. This equable and settled wealth neither agitates the mind of the possessor nor provokes others to a jealous emulation; and without the differences of social rank which spring from it, it may well be questioned whether some of the best parts of our nature would not remain uncultivated. For the truth is, that there is nothing so uninteresting to man, nothing so ungenial and unfruitful, as social equality. Man's nature and the wants of his imagination call for the contrary, and where institutions

are ostensibly calculated to remove the sense of inequality, they will in reality remove only so much of it as is connected with our better nature, and bring into strong and naked operation the inequalities of a monied scale. This is no doubt one of the tendencies of our institutions at the present time—a tendency which will be counteracted and conquered, as we trust—one tendency only amongst many; but one against which those who value the true liberty of their country, the liberty of its individual minds and hearts, should strenuously contend: and it is not a tendency as regards the lower classes only. Social distinction is an object to high and low, and is open to every one of us through money, and money will procure for every one consideration, service, and what is equally indispensable to mankind, civility; and in this state of society the liberty of the higher classes is not less in danger than that of the lower. For with the restless activity, the ambition, the importance attached to money, the pecuniary taint which infects all

the relations between the upper and lower classes, the absence of the disinterested courtesies and unpaid good offices of life which inspire confidence between those classes and seem to place them in a relation of human brotherhood with each other—with all these elements of our society, there arises naturally its chief characteristic on the evil side of the account, pride, or a pusillanimous fear of opinion—pride which,

> 'Howe'er disguised
> In its own majesty, is littleness—'

and invariably undermines the strength and independence of the heart. The study of Mr. Wordsworth's writings will assist more than any other literary influence that is now abroad to abate the spirit of pride and cherish the spirit of independence; and in closing our remarks upon the political series of his Sonnets, we will sum up the doctrine to be derived from them as teaching, that in so far as the political institutions of a country place any man in such circum-

stances as to give avarice, ambition, or pride the dominion over his heart, whatever may be the name given or the virtue ascribed to those institutions, they cost that man his liberty.

We now come to the series which Mr. Wordsworth has entitled 'Itinerary,' and which we have already alluded to as 'the sundry contemplation of his travels.' Scenery, cities, manners, local traditions, recorded events, incidents of the moment, remains of antiquity, products of modern taste, abodes, sites and occupants, viaducts, railways and steam-boats, names, clouds, and echoes,—nothing comes amiss to Mr. Wordsworth on his travels, and sonnets spring up in his path wherever he goes. And amidst the multitude of objects which attract his attention, it is difficult to say that any one class has more power over him than another. Natural objects have undoubtedly had the greatest influence originally, as we may learn from the celebrated lines written on

visiting Tintern Abbey, and from many other passages, and amongst these 'the family of floods' are mentioned by the poet as standing first in his regard, and many members of that family are celebrated in the Sonnets, from 'the stately Eden' in his own country, to

> '—that young stream that smites the throbbing rocks
> Of Viamala.'

But natural objects are so vividly recalled to his memory when others are presented to his eyes, the colours of them are so interwoven with the whole tissue of his mind, that hardly any subject is treated separately from them. And on the other hand, his sense of the beauty of external nature is seldom merely passive; the activities of his intellect are excited by it rather than merged in it, and his poetry is not often purely descriptive. We will quote the sonnet we can find which is the most so,—a description of the plain between Namur and Liege, in which the effect of nature's tranquillity is heightened by allusion to the

frequent warfare of which that plain has been the theatre:—

'What lovelier home could gentle Fancy choose?
Is this the stream, whose cities, heights, and plains,
War's favourite playground, are with crimson stains
Familiar, as the morn with pearly dews?
The morn, that now, along the silver MEUSE,
Spreading her peaceful ensigns, calls the swains
To tend their silent boats and ringing wains,
Or strip the bough whose mellow fruit bestrews
The ripening corn beneath it. As mine eyes
Turn from the fortified and threatening hill,
How sweet the prospect of yon watery glade,
With its grey rocks clustering in pensive shade—
That, shaped like old monastic turrets, rise
From the smooth meadow-ground, serene and still!'

This seems pure description; yet what a serious satire is expressed in one word, 'War's favourite *playground!*

In the following sonnet, entitled 'The Trosachs,' the moral is blended with the description throughout:—

'There 's not a nook within this solemn Pass,
But were an apt confessional for One
Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
That life is but a tale of morning grass
Withered at eve. From scenes of art which chase
That thought away, turn, and with watchful eyes

Feed it 'mid Nature's old felicities,
Rocks, rivers, and smooth lakes more clear than glass
Untouched, unbreathed upon. Thrice happy quest,
If from a golden perch of aspen spray
(October's workmanship to rival May)
The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast
That moral sweeten by a heaven-taught lay,
Lulling the year, with all its cares, to rest!'

How skilfully does that suggestion in the parenthesis, of the sunshiny colouring of the aspen in October, adumbrate the cheerfulness to be bestowed by natural piety upon the decline of life! preparing for the principal illustration of the same idea in the song of the red-breast, which only begins to sing when other birds have ceased. We will annex to this a sonnet, congenial in sentiment and imagery, written at Bala-sala, Isle of Man, in the person of a friend of the author. The convent spoken of is Rushen Abbey:—

'Broken in fortune, but in mind entire
And sound in principle, I seek repose
Where ancient trees this convent-pile enclose
In ruin beautiful. When vain desire
Intrudes on peace, I pray the eternal Sire
To cast a soul-subduing shade on me,
A grey-haired, pensive, thankful refugee;
A shade—but with some sparks of heavenly fire

Once to these cells vouchsafed. And when I note
The old tower's brow yellowed as with the beams
Of sunset ever there, albeit streams
Of stormy weather-stains that semblance wrought,
I thank the silent monitor, and say
" Shine so, my aged brow, at all hours of the day!"'

When Mr. Wordsworth is upon his travels, the very modes of conveyance 'have their authentic comment,' and suggest thoughts, recollections, and feelings. We find him, in 1820, in a carriage on the banks of the Rhine, travelling with a speed which cheats him of half his enjoyment, and wishing to be on foot as in the days of his youth:—

'Amid this dance of objects sadness steals
O'er the defrauded heart—while sweeping by,
As in a fit of Thespian jollity,
Beneath her vine-leaf crown the green Earth reels:
Backward, in rapid evanescence, wheels
The venerable pageantry of Time,
Each beetling rampart and each tower sublime,
And what the dell unwillingly reveals
Of lurking cloistral arch, through trees espied
Near the bright river's edge. Yet why repine?
To muse, to creep, to halt at will, to gaze—
Such sweet wayfaring—of life's spring the pride,
Her summer's faithful joy—*that* still is mine,
And in fit measure cheers autumnal days.

We are happy to know that the 'fit measure' of pedestrian strength which remained to Mr. Wordsworth in the year 1820 is yet with him in 1841, and that the fainting London tourist may still meet with him, robust and fresh, on the top of Helvellyn or other 'cloud-sequestered heights,' exercising his functions as one of 'Nature's Privy Council.'

If Mr. Wordsworth was not quite content to be whirled along the banks of the Rhine in a carriage, it was to be expected that he should betray more impatience in a steam-boat:—

> 'Who but must covet a cloud-seat, or skiff
> Built for the air, or wingèd Hippogriff?
> That he might fly, where no one could pursue,
> From this dull Monster and her sooty crew.'

But what some persons would consider the poetic or romantic view of things never shuts out from Mr. Wordsworth's mind the contemplation of the whole truth. For the whole truth received into a poetic mind of the highest, that is, of the philosophic order, may always take a poetical shape, and cannot but

be more fruitful than half-truths. And thus we have a notice, in a sonnet on steam-boats, viaducts and railways, that Mr. Wordsworth is not to be misled by any false lights into regarding with other feelings than those of hope and gratulation the victories of mind over matter:—

'Motions and Means, on land and sea at war
With old poetic feeling, not for this
Shall ye, by Poets even, be judged amiss!
Nor shall your presence, howsoe'er it mar
The loveliness of Nature, prove a bar
To the Mind's gaining that prophetic sense
Of future change, that point of vision, whence
May be discovered what in soul ye are.
In spite of all that beauty may disown
In your harsh features, Nature doth embrace
Her lawful offspring in Man's art; and Time,
Pleased with your triumphs o'er his brother Space,
Accepts from your bold hands the proffered crown
Of hope, and smiles on you with cheer sublime.'

Twenty years ago our readers may remember that there was a literary controversy of some celebrity, in which Lord Byron, Mr. Campbell, and Mr. Bowles were the principal performers, on the subject of the comparative merits of nature and art in supplying subjects

for poetry. A little of Mr. Wordsworth's philosophy, or a little of Shakspeare's, would have taught the disputants either not to distinguish at all between these subjects, or to distinguish more clearly. There are a few words in the 'Winter's Tale' which say more than anything which we can recollect to have been said then :—

'*Perdita.* Sir, the year growing ancient,—
Nor yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter,—the fairest flowers o' the season
Are our carnations, and streak'd gilliflowers,
Which some call Nature's bastards: of that kind
Our rustic garden 's barren; and I care not
To get slips of them.
'*Polixenes.* Wherefore, gentle maiden,
Do you neglect them?
'*Perdita.* For I have heard it said,
There is an art which in their piedness shares
With great creating Nature.
'*Polixenes.* Say there be;
Yet Nature is made better by no mean,
But Nature makes that mean: so, o'er that art,
Which, you say, adds to Nature, is an art
That Nature makes.'—(Act iv., sc. 3.)

This is the philosophical view of the matter, and Mr. Wordsworth's taste is as universal as philosophy itself; and his philosophy and

his poetry are never found in collision with each other, but always in an easy alliance.

We are aware, however, that it has sometimes been said that Mr. Wordsworth has written in disparagement of science. How incapable he is of doing so, our readers have had some means of judging. The charge has been brought, we believe, by two very different classes of persons,—by those who mistake certain scientific nomenclatures and classifications for sciences themselves, and, on the other hand, by those who have a genuine comprehension of science, but are led, from the want of other knowledge, faculties, or feelings, to think that the material sciences are the highest walks of human contemplation. Yet in reality neither the sciolist nor the adept has any reason to complain. For the former Mr. Wordsworth has not perhaps absolute respect, but certainly a genuine indulgence—witness the sketches in the 'Excursion,' of 'the wandering herbalist' and his fellow-wanderer—

'He who with pocket-hammer smites the edge
Of luckless rock or prominent stone, disguised

In weather-stains or crusted o'er by Nature ..
With her first growths—detaching by the stroke
A chip or splinter to resolve his doubts;'

He finds no fault with either of these gentlemen:—

'Intrusted safely each to his pursuit,
Earnest alike, let both from hill to hill
Range; if it please them speed from clime to clime;
The mind is full—no pain is in their sport.'

Thus gently does Mr. Wordsworth, even when speaking by the mouth of the least gentle of his *poëmatis personæ*, deal with the dabblers in science. Shakspeare also was a good-natured observer; yet these men of nomenclatures did not escape so easily in his hands:—

'These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
That give a name to every fixed star,
Have no more profit of their shining nights
Than those that walk and wot not what they are.' *

So much for the sciolist. And next for the complaint of the adept. We do not desire to maintain that Mr. Wordsworth pays knee-worship even to *his* idol, or that

* Love's Labour 's Lost.

he reverences as the highest knowledge that which, however consummate in its kind, is limited to the purely material sciences. All that we contend for is, that, as in the sonnets heretofore quoted, so in his other writings, Mr. Wordsworth invariably treats the material sciences with the respect which is due to their place amongst the powers and instrumentalities of nature. He would not deny that they are powers of stupendous importance in their results, but neither would he admit that they are on that account entitled, when standing alone, to confer the highest rank upon the intellects through which those results are brought about. He would not deny, certainly, that stupendous moral as well as material results are the offspring of the purely material sciences; for as matter is always acting upon spirit with prodigious force throughout the portion of the universe which is known to man, so there can be no doubt that the material products of science operate incalculable changes in the moral condition of

mankind. But neither would he admit that that which acts upon spirit through matter, however important the agency may be in its consequences, can be regarded as an agency of an equally high order with that which acts upon spirit through spirit.

Thus, in the eighth book of the Excursion, he rejoices and exults in the mastery exercised by science over the elements; but rejoices in it hoping that the time will come when man, 'strengthened yet not dazzled' by his scientific conquests,

> 'Shall learn, though late, that all true glory rests,
> All praise, all safety, and all happiness,
> Upon the moral law.'

And he proceeds to show that even the sciences themselves must have the same support, in order to ensure them against decay and oblivion:—

> 'Egyptian Thebes,
> Tyre, by the margin of the sounding waves,
> Palmyra, central in the desert, fell;
> And the arts died by which they had been raised.
> Call Archimedes from his buried tomb
> Upon the plain of vanished Syracuse,
> And feelingly the sage shall make report

> How insecure, how baseless in itself,
> Is the philosophy whose sway depends
> On mere material instruments; how weak
> Those arts and high inventions, if unpropped
> By Virtue! He, with sighs of pensive grief,
> Amid his calm abstractions, would admit
> That not the slender privilege is theirs
> To save themselves from blank forgetfulness!'

If, therefore, we are to separate what we cannot wish to see separated—if we *must* separate knowledge and intellectual power into degrees and orders of precedency—we should concur with Mr. Wordsworth in giving the first place to the kind which lives in the hearts of men and fortifies the imaginative faith, which kindles the affections, animates the belief in things unseen, and multiplies

> 'The spiritual presences of absent things.'

This kind of knowledge and power, depending immediately upon the imagination, but not to be cast loose from scientific laws, may, we think, without wrong to any other, be placed in the first rank of human intelligences. In the Celestial Hierarchy, according to Diony-

sius Areopagita, the Angels of Love hold the first place, the Angels of Light the second, and Thrones and Dominations the third. Amongst Terrestrials, the intellects which act through the imagination upon the heart of man, may be accounted the first in order, the merely scientific intellects the second, and the merely ruling intellects — those which apply themselves to the government of mankind without the aid of either science or imagination—will not be disparaged if they are placed last.

But Mr. Wordsworth, as we collect, would be better pleased to contemplate the conjunction, than the subordinated separation of these powers, and he anticipates the time when science, allying itself with the imaginative faculty, and through this reaching and inspiring the heart, shall be exalted into philosophy:—

> 'Science then
> Shall be a precious visitant; and then,
> And only then, be worthy of her name.
> For then her heart shall kindle; her dull eye,
> Dull and inanimate, no more shall hang
> Chained to its object in brute slavery;

But taught with patient interest to watch
The processes of things, and serve the cause
Of order and distinctness, not for this
Shall it forget that its most noble use,
Its most illustrious province, must be found
In furnishing clear guidance, a support
Not treacherous, to the mind's *excursive* power.'*

Nor does Mr. Wordsworth regard the advances of science with any jealousy, as if it were possible that they could tend to limit the province of the imagination. That province he knows to be boundless; and though many of the secrets of nature may be discovered, and the pride of man may for the moment exult inordinately, forgetting what mysteries remain which Science can never penetrate and Faith can but see darkly, yet he is assured that man is and always will be an imaginative being; and that whatever he may search out and lay open, he must still come to the unseen and the inscrutable at last, and be recalled to the awe and humility which befits his condition:—

'Desire we past illusions to recal?
To reinstate wild Fancy would we hide
Truths whose thick veil Science has drawn aside?

* Excursion, book iv.

No,—let this age, high as she may, instal
In her esteem the thirst that wrought man's fall,
The universe is infinitely wide;
And conquering Reason, if self-glorified,
Can nowhere move uncrossed by some new wall
Or gulf of mystery, which thou alone,
Imaginative Faith! canst overleap,
In progress toward the fount of Love,—the throne
Of Power, whose ministers the records keep
Of periods fixed, and laws established, less
Flesh to exalt than prove its nothingness.'

It was in no other spirit—it was in the profound humility of his own nature, and with a deep insight into man's nature, that the great founder of modern material philosophy offered up his 'Student's Prayer':—

'This also we humbly and earnestly beg, that human things may not prejudice such as are divine, neither that from the unlocking of the gates of sense, and the kindling of a greater natural light, anything of incredulity or intellectual night may arise in our minds towards divine mysteries. But rather that, by our mind thoroughly cleansed and purged from fancy and vanities, and yet subject and perfectly given up to the divine oracles, there may be given unto Faith the things which are Faith's.'

Devoutly is it to be wished that, along with the principles of material philosophy which have been as the light of day to the natural

world in the generations succeeding Lord Bacon, there could have been communicated to all of his disciples, as it has been in degree to some, the greatness of that man's religious heart.

But we are to proceed with the Itinerant. Manners are regarded by him, no less than arts and sciences, with an inquisitive eye, and pondered in a spirit of comprehensive appreciation. He observes the decay of ancient manners and the progress of innovation, reaching even to the Scotch Highlands,—but he observes them with no predisposition to prefer what is old to what is modern on any other than just and reasonable grounds: his desire is only to examine into the different effects of changes, to weigh losses against gains, and to 'have a right judgment in all things.' When, indeed, he sees

> 'the umbrella spread
> To weather-fend the Celtic herdsman's head'—

there arise in his mind some doubts and misgivings, and he pauses before he can regard the superior comforts of the Celtic herdsman

with unmixed satisfaction. Still it is but a doubt and an inquiry, not a decision; and he does not fail to intimate that there is another side to the question:—

'The pibroch's note, discountenanced or mute;
The Roman kilt, degraded to a toy
Of quaint apparel for a half-spoilt boy;
The target, mouldering like ungathered fruit;
The smoking steam-boat eager in pursuit,
As eagerly pursued; the umbrella spread
To weather-fend the Celtic herdsman's head—
All speak of manners withering to the root,
And some old honours, too, and passions high:
Then may we ask, though pleased that thought should range
Among the conquests of civility,
Survives imagination—to the change
Superior? Help to virtue does she give?
If not, O Mortals, better cease to live!'

The last we shall quote from this itinerary series shall be an historical recollection—the Sonnet entitled 'Mary Queen of Scots (landing at the mouth of the Derwent, Workington).'

'Dear to the Loves, and to the Graces vowed,
The Queen drew back the wimple that she wore;
While to the throng that on the Cumbrian shore
Her landing hailed, how touchingly she bowed!
And like a star (that, from a sombre cloud
Of pine-tree foliage poised in air, forth darts,

When a soft summer gale at evening parts
The gloom that did its loveliness enshroud)
She smiled: but Time, the old Saturnian Seer,
Sighed on the wing as her foot pressed the strand,
With step prelusive to a long array
Of woes and degradations hand in hand;
Weeping captivity, and shuddering fear—
Stilled by the ensanguined block of Fotheringay?'

In the series of ecclesiastical sonnets we find Mr. Wordsworth, for the first time, planning a work in which his inspiration and his themes were to be drawn more immediately from books than from Nature or from his own experience and observation. The first which we shall quote represents the recovery of the Church after the persecution under Diocletian:—

'As, when a storm hath ceased, the birds regain
Their cheerfulness, and busily re-trim
Their nests, or chant a gratulating hymn
To the blue ether and bespangled plain;
Even so, in many a reconstructed fane,
Have the survivors of this storm renewed
Their holy rites with vocal gratitude:
And solemn ceremonials they ordain,
To celebrate their great deliverance;
Most feelingly instructed 'mid their fear—
That persecution, blind with rage extreme,

May not the less, through Heaven's mild countenance,
Even in her own despite, both feed and cheer;
For all things are less dreadful than they seem.'

The last line expresses one of those truths which present themselves with peculiar force to an imaginative mind, owing to its individual experience. For to such a mind the absent and the distant appear with a vividness of colouring which realities when present will generally be found to fall short of; and when fear is the passion by which such a mind is seized, it will be apt to lose sight, in the liveliness of its prospective emotions, of the resources with which its imaginative and susceptible nature abounds, and which might enable it to deal victoriously with the actual presence of the thing feared, or even with the nearer approach of danger. For fear itself is not more the characteristic of a highly imaginative mind than faith; and the love which casteth out fear will grow in power, and all the antagonist emotions will be awakened, as the thing apprehended becomes less matter of imagination

and more matter of distinct perception and knowledge. Poets, therefore, have perpetual occasion to remind themselves that

'.... all things are less dreadful than they seem—'

and thereby to apply the consolations of the imaginative reason as a corrective to the excesses of imaginative passion. 'Present fears,' says Shakspeare,

'.... are less than horrible imaginings.' *

And Milton may have been thinking less of the Devil than of what he had himself experienced, when he gave expression, in the person of Satan, to a similar sentiment:—

'If there be worse, the expectation more
Of worse torments me than the feeling can;
I would be at the worst; worst is my port,
My harbour, and my ultimate repose,
The end I would attain, my final good.' †

Fear is, indeed, a far greater evil in the world than danger; as it is also to a far greater extent an evil of Man's making.

We are now about to conclude our remarks

* Macbeth, Act i. Sc. iii. † Paradise Regained, book iii. l. 209.

on Mr. Wordsworth's Sonnets. It has been our chief object and endeavour, as we have already said, to justify the now nearly universal fame of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, in the eyes of a few dissentients whose intellectual rank and position make it both natural and important that they should go along with the world when the world happens to go right. To such men the opinion of the world on poetical matters is not of high authority; nor is it so, as we imagine, to Mr. Wordsworth himself. But there is a distinction to be taken between the world's opinion when it is obtained by captivation, and the same opinion when it has formed itself by slow and difficult growth, and the gradual conquest of prejudice. Lord Bacon says the maxim of Phocion as to moral matters may be well transferred to intellectual—that if the multitude shall assent and applaud, a man should forthwith examine himself to find wherein he has erred:*

* 'Optimè traducitur illud Phocionis à moribus ad intellectualia; *ut statim se examinare debeant homines, quid erraverint*

but this is to be understood of assent and applause by acclamation, not of the diligent and cultivated approval which grows upon the popular mind, in the first instance from deference to the authority of competent judges, and afterwards from the genuine and heartfelt adoption of that judgment when the better part of the popular mind has been brought to the serious study of what is good. Upon that approval, coming sooner or later, but seldom very soon, the fame of Lord Bacon himself, and of Phocion, and of every other great man rests. In the case of some of the greatest English poets of former times, fame, in the loftiest sense at least of that word, was postponed till it was posthumous. In the case of Mr. Wordsworth it would have been so, had his life not been a longer one than theirs; for it is only within the last few years that the latent love of his poetry, which was cherished here and there in secret places amongst the wise and good, has

aut peccaverint, si multitudo consentiat et complaudat.'—Novum Organum, i. 77.

caught and spread into a general admiration. Had Mr. Wordsworth died, like Shakspeare, at fifty-three years of age, he would have died in confident anticipation, no doubt, of a lasting fame, but without any witness of it in this world. Had he died, like Milton, at sixty-six years of age, he would have seen more than the beginnings of it certainly, but he would not have seen it in all the fulness to which it has now attained. But if he were to live to the age of Methuselah, he would not see the time come when there were no able and learned men indisposed or disqualified, by some unlucky peculiarity, for the appreciation of his poetry: for the human intellect, even when eminently gifted, seems in peculiar cases to be subject to some strange sort of cramp or stricture, and whilst in the full vigour of its general powers, to be stricken with particular incapacities, which, to those who are not affected by them, are as incomprehensible as the incapacity (which sometimes occurs) of the visual sense to distinguish between red and green. We

have known men of acknowledged abilities to whom Milton was a dead letter,—or rather let us say, in the case of whom the living letter of Milton fell upon a dead mind: and one like instance we have known in which Dryden was preferred to Shakspeare. It is often, we are aware, in vain to minister to a mind in this state; but all such are not incurable, and we have been desirous to do what might be in our power to reduce the number of cases.

And there is one caution which we should wish more especially to convey to those who have yet to learn, and who are sincerely desirous to learn, to appreciate Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, and which throughout our remarks it has been our purpose to impress; namely, that it is to be read *studiously*. Mr. Wordsworth never intended so to write that those who ran might read. To detain for a brief moment these runaway readers is the proper aim of those who are snatching at a transient popularity; and this writing for a cursory perusal has been the bane of litera-

ture in our times and the ruin of art. But neither to this aim nor to this way of writing has Mr. Wordsworth ever lent himself. In his earlier efforts we find him wishing to write that which

> 'The high and tender Muses shall accept
> With gracious smile, *deliberately* pleased;'

and in his valedictory effusion at the end of this volume, in which he speaks of having drawn together and classified the Sonnets, like flowerets—

> 'Each kind in several beds of one parterre,'—

he says he has thus disposed them in order that

> —— 'so placed his nurselings may requite
> *Studious* regard with opportune delight.'

Those who read the Sonnets in this studious spirit will not often find that they are detained by the style longer than they would themselves wish to be for the sake of dwelling upon the thoughts. Occasional obscurity there may be; the sonnet is a form of poetry in which style is put under high pressure,

and it is no part of our purpose to represent Mr. Wordsworth as an impeccable poet; but a poet who writes for posterity, though he will bestow infinite labour upon perspicuity, will not sacrifice to it the depth and comprehensiveness which, whilst it is indispensable to the truthfulness of his conceptions, may be often irreconcilable with absolute distinctness of expression. Those writers who never go further into a subject than is compatible with making what they say indisputably clear to man, woman, and child, may be the lights of this age, but they will not illuminate another.

MR. DE VERE'S POEMS.*

We have heard from the eldest of our living poets the remark that there is in the poetry of the young a charm of youthfulness which, however far it may be from compensating for youth's imperfections, is still not to be met with in the poetical products of the maturer mind. It may be added that there is also a knowledge to be derived from the poetry of a rising generation which other poetry cannot yield. We know from the general cast and character of it what spirit is abroad amongst our literary and meditative youth—amongst the many who, though not gifted with any poetical utterance of their own, are nevertheless one in spirit with

* A Critical Notice of "The Waldenses, or the Fall of Rora, a Lyrical Sketch, with other Poems, by Aubrey De Vere." Republished from No. 143, of the 'Quarterly Review,' being that for the month of May, 1843.

those who are. And this is an important class to be acquainted with for those who would look a little before them and anticipate the flower and the fruit which this bud of poetry may seem to promise—the influence over literature and society likely to be exercised by the spirit which dictates this poetry when it shall have passed on to maturity.

Those who have thought it worth while to observe the nascent poetical spirit of the last few years will have perceived that it is very different from that which ruled the poetical youth of twenty years ago. At that period there was not only a want of moral and spiritual truth in our juvenile poetry, but also an absence of moral and spiritual doctrine, whether true or false. There seemed to be no consciousness on the part of the aspirant that either his reader or himself were to have any share in the higher interests or the deeper nature of man. Superficial beauty and sentimental passion filled up the circle of his aims: the Thalassian Venus did not, according to the apologue, bring him to the

Uranian; and invoking the former deity only, she heard him according to her kind; she 'gave him his desire and sent a leanness into his soul withal.' These effeminacies, if not altogether extinct, have at all events ceased to be the prevailing characteristic. The sorry sensibilities of twenty years ago have given place to higher moods and worthier endeavours—

'For now 'tis stale to sigh, to weep and groan,
So woe hath wearied woe, moan tired moan.'*

Middle age has overtaken the aspirants who had nothing to show us but the complexion of youth; and from the juvenile poets who are succeeding to them, perhaps the last thing that we should look for is the merely erotic effusion, the love-elegy, or

'—— serenate which the starved lover sings
To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.'†

Nevertheless, these rising poets have faults enough of their own; amongst which we should say that the most prevalent are obscurity, subtlety, and forced thinking.

The poetry in Mr. De Vere's volume bears

* Shakspeare's Sonnets. † Milton.

upon the face of it the evidence of having been produced at different periods of youthful life. Against none of it do we bring the charge of forced thinking, for there is apparent throughout an easy and spontaneous activity of thought: some of it, however, appears to us to be chargeable with obscurity and subtlety, and the abundance of the author's resources has often betrayed him into a crowding and compressing of thoughts, insomuch that those which are worthy to stand conspicuously will often want room and development. We find this fault with not a few of the miscellaneous poems, the product, as we conceive, of a period of youthful genius when all manner of thoughts find a place in the mind, but when the great and small have not yet adjusted themselves according to their due proportions. Others of the miscellaneous poems belong apparently to a later period, when this adjustment has taken place;—whilst the 'Lyrical Sketch,' which occupies the first ninety-two pages of the volume, or about one-third of the whole,

appears to us to have both the defects and the charms of an earlier period than either—a want of firmness of hand and tone in the execution of the dramatic colloquy, with much force and ardour under the excitement of the lyrical movements, a love of beauty above all things, and a fresh sympathy with the elementary feelings of our nature.

Whatever the faults may be which we attribute to that portion (and it is not the larger portion) of Mr. De Vere's poetry which we regard as more or less juvenile, it is impossible to doubt that the volume as a whole establishes his claim to be heard, and all that we propose to do is to set this claim before our readers, and leave it to find what acceptance it may.

'The Waldenses or the Fall of Rora,' though entitled 'a Lyrical Sketch,' is lyrical in part only, the groundwork of the piece being laid in dramatic colloquy and in blank verse. It is in three acts, and may be described as a Romanesque modification of the Greek tragedy. The story is founded

upon the persecution and massacre of the Waldenses which took place in the year 1655; the same which gave occasion to Milton's celebrated sonnet; and the materials, treated in the spirit of a purely dramatic representation, would have been deeply and distressingly tragic. Mr. De Vere's genius, on the contrary, is buoyant and elastic, 'redolent of joy and youth,' delighting in images of tenderness and beauty, intolerant of despondency, and exulting in the strength and fervours of religious hope. A veritable representation of such a subject by such a writer could hardly have been successful, and Mr. De Vere has cast his poem in a form rather ideal than realising, and more lyric than dramatic.

The valley of Rora, where the scene is laid, is presented to us in the first act and part of the second, as teeming with cheerful sights and sounds: there are glowing lights, flashing streams, trellised huts, and wood-walks, and birds, and flowers, and rainbows; the rocks are musical; the forests and the glaciers are bright with the hues of the rising or

the setting sun; there are shepherds and shepherdesses, and old men and troops of children, rejoicing in a world that is full of blessings and celebrating their joy and thanksgiving by day and night in matins and vespers and nocturns. These scenes are crossed by others in which a weak cardinal and a wicked abbot carry forward their machinations, preparing, by fraudulent pretexts and assurances, a way into the valleys for the military force. Towards the middle of the second act the aspect of things becomes threatening and warlike; the peasants are aroused to a sense of their danger; but the spirit of liberty springs up amongst them in its sanguine and animated mood, and hitherto there is nothing of anxiety or gloom. But towards the end of this act, Agnes, the heroine (who with others had been seized by the abbot as a hostage), is led to the stake, and the scene approaches the verge of painful and horrible realities, when suddenly it escapes into lyrical strains, alternated between the martyr and a chorus of

angels, and typifying the triumph of faith and hope and religious rapture over bodily pain. In like manner throughout the third act, as the tragic element comes to predominate more and more, the form which it assumes becomes more and more idealized, more and more lyrical, and even at the last the horrors of the catastrophe are surmounted by the immortal aspirations and moral glories of the victims, and there is more of beauty in the storm-lights than of terror in the storm.

Our first extract shall be a few stanzas from one of the effusions which we have described as chiefly characteristic of the first act and the earlier scenes of the second:—

'How dim, how still this slumbering wood!
And O, how sweetly rise
From clouded boughs, and herbs bedewed,
Their odours to the skies!

Sweet, as that mood of mystery,
Where thoughts, that hide their hues
And shapes, are only noticed by
The fragrance they diffuse.

But hark! o'er all the mountain verge,
The night-wind sweeps along;

O haste and tune its echoing surge
To a prelusive song;

A song of thanks and laud to Him
Who makes our labour cease;
Who feeds with love the midnight dim,
And hearts devout with peace.'

From the scenes which are in blank verse we will take one passage,—an exposition of the meaning of liberty by a Waldensian chief:—

'It means man's duty so to tread the earth,
As one obedient to God's prime decree,
"Be thou the Lord of that fair world below:"
It means man's duty so to gaze on heaven,
As one in whom some portion yet abides
Of that fair image which God made us in:
It means that sacred ordonnance of life,
By which, in every order and degree,
There is made room for Virtue, and a place
Is shaped, and girt around, and consecrated,
For all the heart's affections rightly prized:
That there should be for all the moral powers
A sphere and exercise, for every hand
A salutary work and undefiling:
That there should be a bright flame on each hearth;
And a frank converse; that no specious lie
Should weaken or supplant the ties of life,
Their duties sap, and thus destroy their sanction:
That there should come between the wife and husband,

The sire and son, no sacerdotal whisper.
It means that life, whate'er its woes, should have
Its dignities no less and its immunities;
And death no deeper shadow than the grave's.'

There is matter in many other passages, and much gracefulness of language and harmony of rhythm: but, as we have already intimated, we consider the whole of the dramatic colloquy to be by design, as well as in merit, subordinate to the lyrical movements; and to these we shall confine our further extracts.

Agnes, the virgin-martyr, has none but a lyrical place in the piece; she can hardly be said to belong to the *dramatis personæ*, for her voice is never heard in speech and only once in song; and until her last appearance—in the flames—we know her only from what is said or sung of her by others. Probably the author may have felt that in order to extenuate the physical horrors of such a fate as hers, it was necessary to endow the object of it with a sort of ethereal and impalpable existence, and so to make the reader regard

her as one who was not 'of the earth earthy'—a creature impassive to 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' Hear, accordingly, the song of the shepherd youths concerning her:—

'Sing the old song, amid the sounds dispersing
That burden treasured in your hearts too long;
Sing it with voice low breathed, but never name her.
She will not hear you, in her turrets nursing
High thoughts, too high to mate with mortal song—
Bend o'er her, gentle Heaven, but do not claim her!

In twilight caves and secret lonelinesses,
She shades the bloom of her unearthly days,
And the soft winds alone have power to woo her;
Far off we catch the dark gleam of her tresses,
And wild birds haunt the wood-walks where she strays,
Intelligible music warbling to her.

That spirit charged to follow and defend her,
He also, doubtless, suffers this love-pain,
And she perhaps is sad, hearing his sighing;
And yet that face is not so sad as tender;
Like some sweet singer's when her sweetest strain
From the heaved heart is gradually dying!'

The second act closes with the martyrdom of Agnes, which the reader has been in some degree prepared to expect by a very solemn chorus at the end of the fourth scene, when

she is delivered into the power of the abbot:—

'There was silence in the heavens
When the Son of Man was led
From the Garden to the Judgment;
Sudden silence, strange and dread!
All along the empyreal coasts
On their knees the immortal hosts
Watched with sad and wondering eyes
That tremendous sacrifice.

There was silence in the heavens
When the priest his garment tore;
Silence when that twain accursed
Their false witness faintly bore.
Silence (though a tremor crept
O'er their ranks) the Angels kept
While that judge, dismayed though proud,
Washed his hands before the crowd.

But when Christ His cross was bearing,
Fainting oft, by slow degrees,
Then went forth the angelic thunder
Of legions rising from their knees.
Each bright spirit grasped a brand;
And lightning flashed from band to band:
An instant more had launched them forth
Avenging terrors to the earth.

Then from God there fell a glory,
Round and o'er that multitude;
And by every fervent angel
With hushing hand another stood:

Another, never seen before,
Stood one moment and no more!—
Peace, brethren, peace! to us is given
Suffering; vengeance is for Heaven!'

We have extracted the above in preference to the longer chorus which concludes the martyrdom, and in which the voice of angels is blended with that of the departing spirit. But either may be read as a specimen of those amongst Mr. De Vere's poems which venture to treat of more worlds than one. Such poetry reminds us of those old works of the sister art, which are divided into two compartments—one terrestrial, the other celestial—the one representing the solid earth and certain of her sons and daughters with faces upturned—the other representing the firmament with groups of glorified spirits which wing the air or tread the clouds. Neither in Mr. De Vere's poems, nor in those of any other poet that we are acquainted with, nor in the paintings, do we ever feel entirely satisfied with the upper or celestial compartments; and in spite of the examples

of the greatest poets of all times and countries, we venture to maintain that that is the highest order of art which dispenses in the main with the use of supernatural machinery, and rests in the conscious power of imparting a divine sublimity to merely natural attributes.

This, however, is a doctrine for which we shall be called to account. We anticipate that Mr. De Vere will adduce the most illustrious example of all, and call up Milton to bear witness against us. But even he, though rising with a glory round his head, will have nothing to say which can shake us in this article of our belief. For we at least cannot doubt that Milton's great work is a continued struggle with insuperable difficulties, and that the victory gained is a victory not over the difficulties, but independently of them —a victory in which the faults of the design stand out unsubdued in the execution; and the triumphs achieved are those of unrivalled powers of intellect, diction, and rhythm, affording a thousand compensations for the faults, but not in any degree abating, not

even disguising them. Admire and applaud as we may, we cannot but be painfully sensible, as often as the supernatural agencies occur, that the artist has set out in a fallacious plane and elevation from the first; and that in mounting the flying steed and presuming into the Heaven of Heavens, he has unduly slighted the warning to which he himself alludes, and has in sad truth 'fallen on the Aleian field, erroneous there to wander.' And the more relief and delight we find in the parts of the poem which are bound 'within the visible diurnal sphere,' and the more we find of surpassing excellence in the discursive and collateral passages, the more we lament the mistake of the poet in adopting a scheme so utterly impracticable, exalting our imagination at the outset only to abase it as we proceed—a scheme of such celestial dignity in its aim and scope, that every detail is in derogation of it and every realization felt to be false to the ideal. The example of the 'Paradise Lost,' then, is no argument with us of the claim of super-

natural machinery to be admitted as a principal constituent into the highest works of art; and we should say of its author, as Lord Bacon has said of the alchemists,* that he has endowed mankind with great treasures of invention, disclosed incidentally and *obiter*, whilst prosecuting a project which it was not in human art to accomplish.

But if Mr. De Vere demands of us whether we would refuse to art in its highest efforts every glimpse of an excursion, however rapid and transitory, beyond the borders of nature, we answer, by no means. There is a region beyond those borders, seen as through a glass darkly, into which art in its highest moods may well be allowed to deviate, provided there be no notion indulged of dwelling in it, describing it, and making it cognizable by the senses. There are supernatural agencies of a spiritual kind, which, in the way of occasional visitations, the highest art may well be allowed to invoke—especially those agencies which, though carried farther than

* Novum Organum, i. 85.

nature carries them, are still in the direction of the course of nature—the gift of prophecy, for instance, carried somewhat farther than 'old experience' might of itself attain to—or a supernatural significancy in natural phenomena, as dreams and coincidences. These we would admit; and if we are asked to be specific as to those which we would exclude, we should say that we object chiefly to the presentation of embodied functions which are out of nature and contrary to nature, and which do not strike the mind as possible detections of the secrets of nature, but as mere inventions and additions. We should say that, in so far as poet or painter introduces physical forms or agencies, which in structure, kind, dimension, or combination, are alien from humanity, he appears to us to recede from the province of the highest imaginative art. The wings of angels—what are they but labels to denote that the human shape to which they are appended is to be deemed and taken to be superhuman? And as to the physical attribute

which they indicate, the conception of a man that flies like a bird cannot be supposed to be a high effort of imagination. And in short, we maintain that throughout art, when the attempt is made to elevate humanity above itself by means of physical adjuncts not belonging to it, the faculty employed falls short in some degree of that spiritual power of the imagination by which a true revelation is made to us of what is most sublime in the nature and destinies of man.

Now there is much of Mr. De Vere's poetry which, in the application of these tests, we should not assign to the highest order of art; and there is some which we think might have been of the highest order had the poet himself been disposed to adopt these tests. At the same time we do not of course require of any poet that all his poetry should be in one vein and belong to the highest class of composition. When Mr. De Vere ascends into the clouds, we are not so much with him as when he walks amongst men; but we do not deny that he moves in the

thinner element with a light and buoyant step.

But to return to the drama. In the third act the pace and speed of it is accelerated; chorus follos fast upon chorus as we advance; and latterly the choruses are interrupted only by snatches of colloquy, indicating in a few words the succession of events. Still, however, there are changes skilfully devised for relief; as an instance of which we would mention, though we have not room to extract, a chorus of children (the only persons who could be unconscious of the approaching conflict) passing through the caverns of the mountains in a vain and mournful search after their friend, the martyred Agnes. In the meantime nature adds her commotions to the agitations of human strife and passion, — there is a storm-chorus; after which an account is brought by a wounded man of the vengeance taken upon the abbot, who had been slain at the altar; and then comes the chorus following:—

'Tyrants say
That men were shaped but to obey:
Dead spokes alone, to roll and reel,
Within their car's revolving wheel!
Let them take heed, for they have driven
In frenzy o'er the rocky plain,
Till earth's deep groans are heard in heaven,
And fire bursts from those wheels amain—
Not soon the stormy flames expire
When hearts contagious in their ire
Burst forth, like forests catching fire.
Or else this madness preys upon their spirit;
That all good things, to man's estate which fall,
Come from their sacred prescience—they inherit
Wisdom divine to nurse this mundane ball!
Yea, they apportion times; with care dispensing
The seasons; when to sow, what days for reaping,
What space for food and labour, praying, sleeping;
With stellar beams our harvests influencing;
Out of the heaven of high conceit diffusing
Sunshine and breeze amid our murmuring grain;
Showering the former and the latter rain—
Or else with groans their vacant hours amusing,
And sending forth a famine, to fulfil
On men of froward heart the counsels of their will!
Such airy dream to realize,
All rights, all instincts they despise;
On every hearth they plant a foot,
Importunate, impure, and brute:
Round every bed a serpent creeps:
They make along the venomed wall
The hundred-footed whisper crawl—

But Vengeance in a moment leaps
Forth from the frowning caverns of her noontide sleeps!'

One magnificent chorus more is inspired by the elation of the conflict before the crisis is past:—

'As though this Freedom they demand of us
Were ours, at will to keep or to bestow!
To them a boon profane, a gift of woe;
For us a loss fatal and blasphemous!
This gift, this precious freedom of the soul,
It is not man's, nor under man's control:
From God it comes; His prophet here, and martyr;
Which when he gives to man, man's sword must guard:
No toy for sport; no merchandize for barter;
A duty, not a boast; the spirit's awful ward!—

Dread, sudden stillness, what art thou portending?
Once more each word I mutter, on mine ear
(Forward in anguish bending)
Drops resonant and clear.
The forest wrecks, each branch and bough,
O'er voiceless caves lie tranquil now:
No sound, except the wind's far wail,
Forth issuing through the portals of the vale,
Now low, now louder and more loud,
Under the bridge-like archway of yon low-hung cloud.
Woe, woe to Tyrants! those who sleep
Long centuries in death-caves deep,
Shall rise their jubilee to keep,
When down into the dust are hurled
The Idols that made dumb the world!

It may be some shall sink more late;
Some meet perchance a milder fate;
But lips their wrongs have flecked with foam
In thunder speak the dirge of Rome!'

After this the conflagration of the village is seen, and then the death of the hero is conveyed, in a grave and simple announcement, by a messenger, himself mortally wounded.

If, as we have already said, there may be found in this poem some of the imperfections of youthful art, 'dull must he be of heart' who would not also find in it the ardour and freshness of youth, the purity of youthful feelings, and the force and simplicity of a mind not going astray after novel sentiments and originalities, but, on the contrary, absorbed in the enthusiasm of its first love for the great elementary principles which are native to the heart of man. There are here no subtleties, no curious inquiries or hintings of undiscovered truths; but at the same time there are thrown up, not unfrequently, such high and grave results of contemplation as passion passing through a thoughtful mind will naturally meet

with on its way. The predominating passion is the love of liberty; but the conception of liberty is as high and religious as the love is passionate. The liberty beloved by the poet is a liberty sanctified by the spirit of humility, cherished and guarded in the spirit of duty, and made perfect through pain.

We now pass to the miscellaneous poems. They are all the issue of a religious mind, and almost all of them are on religious subjects; and the devotional feeling by which they are animated may be characterised as tender, sanguine, and joyous. We have songs and hymns for various feasts, and for each of the canonical hours, and for other occasions; and the spirit of a 'Jubilate' is in them all. The poet has a manifest vocation to 'serve the Lord with gladness,' as well as to 'come before his presence with a song;' and, with very few exceptions, we find him treating all subjects and celebrating all hours canonical or secular, though in a great variety of strains, yet in one characteristic spirit—that of a light heart in a serious mind. The hour of midnight is

not commonly regarded as the most cheerful of the twenty-four, yet in Mr. De Vere's hymn it reflects a sort of soft and solemn jucundity. We have room for only the first three stanzas:—

'The stars shine bright while earth is dark!
While all the woods are dumb,
How clear those far off silver chimes
From tower and turret come!

Chilly but sweet the midnight air:
And lo! with every sound,
Down from the ivy-leaf a drop
Falls glittering to the ground.

'Twas night when Christ was born on earth;
Night heard His faint, first cry;
While Angels carolled round the star
Of the Epiphany.'

In the smaller poems the thoughts are more concentrated—in some too much so, certainly, for the popular taste and understanding; but in these, more perhaps than in any of the poems, are to be found the characteristics of Mr. De Vere's genius, and more especially the peculiarities which make his genius characteristic of the generation of poets to which he

belongs—a thoughtful, searching, and doctrinal race. In many of them we can be at no loss to perceive that Mr. De Vere leans to the Tractarian way of thinking in matters ecclesiastical; and if we are to range him amongst the poets who have devoted themselves to the celebration of that form of doctrine, most assuredly his place must be to lead the choir. There is nothing in his book, however, which is calculated to create alarm or provoke controversy in any quarter. Even those who fear most an unconscious tendency towards Popery in the opinions of some of our Oxford divines, will trace nothing of such a tendency in Mr. De Vere's writings. The following lines on 'Rites and Ceremonies' appear to us to be in anything but a Roman Catholic spirit:—

'Mere inward feelings, self-supplanted, perish;'
Things outward, void of spirit, ne'er had life:
Then, either class who prizes, both must cherish;
And learn to harmonize their natural strife.
Christ, that in Heaven our visible nature wears,
Permits the union, consecrates it, shares:
And man with his own heart must be at one
Who lives with God in genuine unison.

The electric flame, by which, through air dispersed,
All life of herb or animal is nursed,
Consumes us, when compacted and intense!
Spirit we are: yet spirit bound in Sense:
In Sense fast bound, though working daily through,
'Till Sense grows Spirit to the Spirit's eye—
But Faith drops low, when Fancy soars too high:
We cannot clasp a rosary of dew!'

And amongst the sonnets—of which there are seventy-two—at the end of the volume, we find one under the title of 'Ritual Excess,' in which the Church of Rome is denounced for that error:—

'Hermes! unearthly were those melodies
That closed the lids of Argus! One by one
His hundred orbs, by a sweet force pressed down,
Yielded successively, like Heaven's bright eyes
When moonlight spreads along her glistening skies.
Smiling he sank, more pleased the more undone;
Inebriate, while through those thin lids the sun
Shone warmly without light!—Thy sorceries,
Italian Church, on our lethargic mould
Work like those songs! Procession, Legend, Rite,
Sap thus a vigilant Faith with spells of Art;
'Till the ever-waking spirit in man's heart
Relinquishes at last its sacred hold
Of God's prime creature, beatific Light!'

Again in the sonnet which follows this,

entitled 'A Romanist's Question Answered,' all the seductions that can be displayed and all the prescriptions that can be urged on behalf of the Romish Church, are briefly repelled by the few words pregnant with the spirit of England and her Christianity—

> 'To those the Truth makes free,
> Sacred as law itself is lawful liberty.'

And in the following sonnet, entitled, 'Conversion,' the liberality of an English heart is most poetically expressed:—

> 'Loud as that trumpet doomed to raise the dead
> God's voice doth sometimes fall on us in fear:
> More often with a music low yet clear,
> Soft whispering "It is I: be not afraid."
> And sometimes, mingling strangely joy with dread,
> It thrills the spirit's caverned sepulchre,
> Deep as that voice which on the awe-struck ear
> Of him, the three-days-buried, murmuring, said
> "Come forth"—and he arose. O Christians, hail
> As brethren all on whom our glorious Sun,
> No matter how, or when, or where, hath shone
> With vital warmth; and neither mourn nor rail
> Because one light, itself unchanging, showers
> A thousand colours on a thousand flowers.'

The general strain and tenour of Mr. De Vere's doctrinal poetry will, no doubt, be most

approved by those who consider that the Church was purest and wisest at the first efflux of Christianity; that the first impress from apostolic zeal had a clearness and truth, the first kindling from apostolic inspiration a fervour and force, for which no lights subsequently accruing could compensate; that the primitive discipline was meant to be the model for all succeeding times, and that the tendency of Christianity is to degenerate. At the same time there is nothing that need offend persons of a very different cast of creed—those who think that Christianity was intended by its divine Founder to grow as well as to spread, and the Church to enlarge and rectify itself both in spirit and in form; and whilst maintaining as unalterable certain fundamental truths, to carry with it through all time a power of adapting itself, in things extrinsic, to the moral and intellectual progress which it was designed to promote. Those who are of this opinion will not, it is true, find that Mr. De Vere is in unison with them on such points; but neither will they find anything to

displease them. For Mr. De Vere's compositions, though showing plainly enough the general mould of doctrine in which they have been cast, are far too poetical to be polemical—far too catholic to wound.

We will close our quotations from the sonnets with one entitled 'Sorrow,' breathing a very full and noble strain of moral exhortation:—

'Count each affliction, whether light or grave,
God's messenger sent down to thee. Do thou
With courtesy receive him: rise and bow;
And ere his shadow pass thy threshold, crave
Permission first his heavenly feet to lave.
Then lay before him all thou hast. Allow
No cloud of passion to usurp thy brow,
Or mar thy hospitality; no wave
Of mortal tumult to obliterate
The soul's marmoreal calmness. Grief should be,
Like joy, majestic, equable, sedate;
Confirming, cleansing, raising, making free;
Strong to consume small troubles; to commend
Great thoughts, grave thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end.'

We have described Mr. De Vere's poems as, with few exceptions, pervaded by a jocund and jubilant spirit. Yet in many other poems, as

well as in the sonnet just quoted, he recognizes the elevating and tranquillizing power of pain, and in none does this spirit of enjoyment savour of any such sentiments as would lead us to fear pain, or fly from it; rather would they teach us to rely upon its power of stirring up the deeper affections, of converting itself into love, and through love passing into a purer joy and a profounder peace. This doctrine seems to be the purport of a poem called 'The Ascetic,' to which we can only refer as remarkable for a quaint simplicity and benign austerity that remind us of George Herbert. It is a doctrine which may be said to have been revealed to Christians in the sufferings which attended the union of the human with the divine nature, and must be always one of the most important of the lights which have been cast by the life of Christ upon the Christian dispensation. 'Pain,' says a writer whose early death will not prevent his being long remembered,—'pain is the deepest thing that we have in our nature, and union through pain has always seemed more real and more

holy than any other.'* In Mr. De Vere's poetry pain appears always as a subject of serene and genial contemplation; it is never seen disconnected from the healing influences that are to be awakened by it; it does not visit the human heart in the character of a fiend or tormentor, but rather on the same mission as that of the Angel who descended from time to time to trouble the waters of the pool of Bethesda.

We have now only two more pieces to notice, each rather longer than the majority of the miscellaneous poems—'A Tale of the Modern Time,' and 'A Tale of the Olden Time.'

It is upon the former of these chiefly that we found the charge which we have brought against Mr. De Vere of subtlety and obscurity. It is a charge often brought in the present time with little reason, from the impatience and indocility of those who complain rather than from anything that ought to be

* Remains of Arthur Henry Hallam.

complained of, and we trust that our objections will not expose us to be counted amongst those who require that poetry should carry with it a dispensation from all effort, or even from much and strenuous effort, of the understanding on the part of the reader. There are critics, we are aware, or readers at least, who consider that all poetry should be—what some of it may doubtless be permitted to be—a refined amusement and pleasant stimulant to the mind in its idler moods, and nothing more. These readers of light poetry are of the same order with the still more numerous readers of what may be called light divinity; and, like them, they consider any demand upon their closer attention to be unwarrantable, and any occurrence of philosophic thought to be a stumbling-block. There are others to whom the poetical form, merely and of itself, acts as a sort of veil to every meaning which is not habitually met with under that form, and who are puzzled by a passage occurring in a poem, which would be at once plain to them, if divested of its cadence and rhythm;—not

because it is thereby put into language in any degree more perspicuous, but because prose is the vehicle they are accustomed to for the particular kind of matter, and they will apply their minds to it in prose, and they will refuse their minds to it in verse. We hope that we may claim not to be confounded with either of these classes of readers. We know of few subjects of contemplation, except the mere details of physical science, to which poetry, in one or other of its forms, may not give fitting expression. Poetry, in our apprehension of it, is 'as broad and general as the casing air;' and having always addicted ourselves chiefly to that order of poets, 'Musas severiores qui colunt,' we are far indeed from finding fault with the expression in poetry of philosophic thought, even though it be occasionally arduous and abstruse. We have little sympathy with the sort of poet who turns aside from the difficult path: we can repeat with a cordial fellow-feeling those melodious lines of one of our greatest writers, in which 'Clio, the strong-eyed muse,' so

disdainfully dismisses such a poet from her presence:—

> 'Go, she cried,
> Sigh among myrtle-bowers, and let thy soul
> Effuse itself in strains so sorrowful sweet,
> That love-sick maids may weep upon thy page,
> Soothed with delicious sorrow.' *

And, on the contrary, we have every sympathy with the poet who is ready for every theme—to whom the highest, the gravest, and the most laborious are not the least genial, and whose delight in his art is what South has described joy to have been in Paradise before the fall, 'a masculine and a severe thing—the recreation of the judgment, the jubilee of reason.'

Our objection to this 'Tale of the Modern Time' is not, then, that the theme is abstruse and recondite and full of psychological abstractions; we should be sorry to see Mr. De Vere treat of such themes principally, but we are by no means sorry to see him undertake them occasionally; our objection is that the subject is not so treated as to

* Southey's Poetical Works, vol. ii. p. 243.

give it all, or anything like all, the distinctness that it is in its nature capable of. An old man tells the story of his moral and spiritual life; a devout and happy childhood, a daring and presumptuous youth, a manhood inebriated with intellectual power and pride, a sudden seizure of spiritual terror, a period of self-contemplation with self-abhorrence symbolized in the persecution of the man by a phantom of himself,—then a visitation of the Holy Spirit, and a restoration to happiness and tranquillity through the love of the Redeemer. So far as there can be said to be a story in the poem, this is the whole of it; and there is nothing, therefore, in the narrative elements, which involves any necessary perplexity or darkness. The psychological truth which it is intended to elucidate seems to be, that where there is an absence of humility and of Christian faith and love, the larger the intellect and the more active the imagination, the more tormenting and terrific will be man's insight into his own being, when once the exultation of youthful

spirits is over and he has been awakened to inquire into his destiny: and on the other hand, that when the soul has passed this stage, and has been prostrated and converted, the large intellect and imagination become ministers to joy and peace. The moral of the story, therefore (if we do not fall short of it), is not in itself such as to occasion any unavoidable perplexity to an intelligent reader. But as the poem is entitled 'a Tale of the *Modern* Time,' there has probably been a further view in the mind of the author—an intention to describe such a course of moral, intellectual, and spiritual experiences as should be distinctively characteristic of our own age. Thus the subject of the tale exemplifies the kind of fruit which is raised in the hotbeds of intellectual civilization; and the tenor of it is to show how formidable an enemy our intellect becomes when, highly cultivated and excited, and yet neither founded in faith nor passionately directed upon any course of external activity, it turns upon the soul. This is, no doubt, a modern

state of things; it represents the self-consciousness of the modern imagination, the introverted eye of the modern mind, or, in the language of the day, the 'subjectivity' of the modern intellect; and there cannot be in these times a more fitting argument for poet, philosopher, or divine, than one which should set forth the dangers, even to present repose, of a high secular cultivation enlightening those whom it does not sanctify. But in this again there is nothing to make obscurity inevitable. In short, we do not see that the subject matter of the poem, or any of its objects or elements, are incompatible with such an enunciation and development as should make them clear to a clear understanding; and we maintain that an intelligent reader would have to read this poem many times over before he would apprehend its scope and drift. For the rest we do not deny that there is a highly imaginative colouring cast over the poem—that the mind of the reader is put into a posture to look out for signs and symbols and to interpret

dark sayings—that there is a facility in the diction and versification which may help him to get easily over what he does not understand, and that there are passages which are both pleasing and striking—of which the following is one :—

'Happy my childhood was; devout and gay:
My youth was full of glory, joy, and might,
Life the swift morning of a stormy day
In summer, when from out the gulfs of night
Day leaps at once to the empyreal height.
Strength without bound in spirit, body, and soul,
I felt; and in my gladness mocked control.

* * * * * *

All art and science at the Gentile feast
Of Western pride advanced, I knew right well:
And laughed to mark the great Book of the East
Push on through all, as through a garden-dell
Bright with frail flowers and paved with glittering shell,
Some Asian elephant. Thereon I gazed,
Indifferent half, indignant half, and praised.

Not one of all my instincts I denied:
Whate'er I saw I sought, and seeking gained;
And rolled against the palate of my pride:
That which the eye desired the hand attained:
Each bar I dashed aside, each pleasure drained;
And then flung proudly from me. I had sworn
All triumphs to achieve, and then to scorn.'

We now turn to 'A Tale of the Olden Time;' otherwise entitled 'The Infant Bridal.' This poem is the reverse of the other: it is—in the phrase of the day again—peculiarly 'objective;' it conveys a vivid representation of antique simplicity, and though not of so high an order as most of Mr. De Vere's poems, it is yet, in our estimation, the most graceful and attractive of them all. There is an ease and lightness in the language which cannot be excelled; and in its complexion and all its features, it is fresh and pure and carries with it the savour of the 'sweet hour of prime,' and

> 'like a garment wears
> The beauty of the morning.'

Two neighbouring countries had been engaged in hereditary wars for a long series of years, till at length their respective sovereigns fell in single combat, each by the hand of the other; leaving, the one an only son, the other an only daughter, both infants. The hostile passions of the two nations being sobered by the sad catastrophe of the duel which was to

have decided their quarrel, it was agreed that the foundations of peace and amity should be laid in a marriage between the two infants—not a very unusual species of arrangement in the middle ages.* The first part of the tale describes the devastation and the woes and hatreds which had attended what had hitherto seemed an interminable warfare. In the second part we have the nuptials thus solemnized:—

'While the young bride in triumph home was led,
They strewed beneath her litter branches green;
And kissed light flowers, then rained them on a head
Unconscious as the flowers what all might mean.
Men, as she past them, knelt; and women raised
Their children in their arms, who laughed and gazed.

That pomp approaching woodland villages,
Or shadowing convents piled near rivers dim,
The church-bells from grey towers girt round with trees
Reiterated their loud wordless hymn;

* Our readers may perhaps remember Froissart's account of the marriage of John, son of the Earl of Cambridge, and Beatrice, daughter of the King of Portugal:—'At the weddynge of these two chyldrene there was made great feaste amonge the lordes and prelates of the realme; and as younge as they were they were layde toguyder in one bedde.'—vol. i. p. 389: *Lord Berners' Translation.*

And golden cross and snowy choir serene
Moved on, old trunks and older towers between.

An hour ere sunset from afar they spied
  The city walls: dark myriads round them clinging:
Now o'er a carpeted expanse they glide;
  Now the old bridge beneath their tread is ringing:
They reach the gate—they pass the towers below—
And now once more emerge, a glittering show!

O what a rapturous shout receives them, blending
  Uncounted bells with chime of human voices!
That fortress old, as on they wind ascending,
  Like the mother of some victor chief rejoices.
From every window tapestries wave: among
The steep and glittering roofs group above group they throng!

The shrine is gained. Two mighty gates expanding
  Let forth a breeze of music onward gushing,
In pathos lulled, yet awful and commanding;
  Down sink the crowds, at once their murmur hushing.
Filled with one soul, the smooth procession slowly
Advances with joined palms, cross-led and lowly.

Lo! where they stand in yon high, fan-roofed chamber—
  Martyrs and saints in dyed and mystic glass
With sumptuous haloes, vermeil, green and amber,
  Flood the fair aisles, and all that by them pass:
Rich like their painter's visions—in those gleams
Blazoning the burden of his Patmian dreams!

A forest of tall lights in mystic cluster,
  Like fire-topped reeds, from their aërial station
Pour on the group a mild and silver lustre:
  Beneath the blessing of that constellation
The rite proceeds—pure source whence rich increase
Of love henceforth, and piety, and peace.

Small was the ring, and small in truth the finger!
  What then? the faith was large that droppèd it down;
A faith that loved not on low Earth to linger,
  But won from Heaven a perdurable crown.
A germ of love, at plighting of that troth,
Into each bosom sank; and grew there with its growth.

The ladies held aloft the bridal pair:
  They on each other smiled, and gazed around
With unabashed delight and generous air,
  Their infant brows with golden circlet bound.
The prelates blessed them, and the nobles swore
True faith and fealty by the sword they bore.

Home to the palace, still in order keeping,
  That train returned; and in the stateliest room
Laid down their lovely burden, all but sleeping,
  Together in one cradle's curtained gloom;
And lulled them with low melody and song;
And jest past lightly 'mid the courtly throng.'

If the spirit of Spenser were to revisit the earth in order to see what had been done in

his own way since he left it, he would find nothing that would give him more pleasure than this. Nor is the childhood that follows this infancy less delightfully depicted :—

'Ah, lovely sight! behold them—creatures twain,
Hand-in-hand wandering through some verdant alley
Or sunny lawn of their serene domain,
Their wind-caught laughter echoing musically;
Or skimming in pursuit of bird-cast shadows
With feet immaculate the enamelled meadows.

Tiptoe now stand they by some towering lily
And fain would peer into its snowy cave:
Now the boy bending o'er some current chilly,
The feebler backward draws him from the wave;
But he persists, and gains for her at last
Some bright flower from the dull weeds hurrying past.

Oft, if some aged priest the cloister crossed,
Both hands they caught, and bade him explicate
(That nought of good through idlesse might be lost)
At large all duties of the nuptial state,
And oft each other kissed with infant glee,
As though this were some great solemnity.

In some old missal sometimes would they look,
Touching with awe the illuminated page;
And scarce for tears the spectacle might brook
Of babes destroyed by Herod's murderous rage.
Here sank a martyr in ensanguined vest:
With more familiar smile there beamed the Virgin blest.

Growing, their confidence as quickly grew:
Light pet and childish quarrel seldom came.
To make them lighter yet and yet more few,
Their nurse addressed them thus—an ancient dame—
"Children, what perfect love should dwell, I ween,
'Twixt husband and young wife, 'twixt king and queen.

"The turtle, widowed of her mate, no more
Lifts her lone head; but pines, and pining dies.
In many a tomb 'mid yon cathedral hoar,
Monarch or knight beside his lady lies:
Such tenderness and truth they showed, that fate
No power was given their dust to separate.

"Rachael, not less, and Ruth, whereof men read
In book ordained our life below to guide,
Loved her own husband each, in word and deed
Loved him full well, nor any loved beside.
And Orpheus too, and Pyramus, men say,
Though Paynim born, lived true, and so shall live for aye.

"What makes us, children, to good angels dear?
Unblemished truth, and hearts in sweet accord.
These also draw the people to revere
With stronger faith their king and sovereign lord.
Then perfect make your love and amity
Alway: but most of all if men are by."

Such lore receiving, ofttimes hand-in-hand
Those babes walked gravely: at the garden gates
Meantime the multitude would flock and stand,
And hooded nuns looked downwards from their grates.

These when the princes marked, they moved awhile
With loftier step and more majestic smile—

Or sat enthroned upon some broidered bank
(The lowlier flowers in wrecks around them thrown),
Shadowed with roses rising rank on rank:
And there, now wreathed, now leaning into one,
They talked, and kissed, again and yet again,
To please good angels thus, and win good men.'

At twelve years of age the boy follows the standard of the Cross to Palestine; and, after some years spent in the wars, to his great honour and glory, he returns to the home and wife of his childhood:—

'Strange joy they found all day in wandering over
The spots in which their childish sports had been;
Husband and wife whilome, now loved and lover,
A broken light brightened yet more the scene!
Night came: a gay yet startled bride he led,
Old rites scarce trusting, to the bridal bed.

No more remains of all this grand old story.
They loved with love eternal: spent their days
In peace, in good to man, in genuine glory.
No spoils unjust they sought, or unjust praise.
Their children loved them, and their people blest—
God grant us all such lives—in Heaven for aye such rest!

But ye profane and unbelieving crowd!
Who dare to mock our childish bridal, cease!
Make answer first, and answer make aloud,
Unblest was that which gave two kingdoms peace?
Much less, much less the high-souled Muse approves
Grey hairs in rage and hate than infant loves!'

We now take our leave of Mr. De Vere's poetry, commending it to the care of a class which we believe to be daily increasing—the students of this art in its higher walks. Poetry has been supposed to be not much the fashion of late years; but the truth is that—with few, very few exceptions—poetry of the highest order never has been the fashion at any time; it has never been extensively popular. It is true of the last twenty years that popular poetry has lost its popularity; but it is also true of the last ten, that poetry which was aimed at a higher mark than popularity, has gained a large accession of devoted students—of readers who seek in poetry the highest knowledge invested with the least perishable charm. It is these men who lay the foundation of a great poet's fame; and it is through a popular recognition of

their judgment and a sympathy with their admiration, that such poets as Milton and Wordsworth come to be popular in the only sense in which they can be said to be so—that is, that their merits come to be fully acknowledged, though but partially felt and perceived, by readers at large.

THE WAYS OF THE RICH AND GREAT.*

THERE is a great and grievous complaint in some quarters, that the Rich are too rich, and that their riches are continually increasing, whilst from other quarters the complaint is, that those who thus complain have as great a desire for riches as if they saw no harm in them. A few years ago a writer of great sagacity and knowledge of the world, represented England to be a country in which poverty is contemptible. Such an account of things tends to propagate the sentiment it

* This essay (which, had it been written in time, might more properly have been included in the volume of 'Notes from Life,' than in that of 'Notes from Books') is now first published, with the exception of a few pages, transferred to it from an article in the *Quarterly Review* for October, 1832. Those pages, in so far as they relate to milliners' apprentices and needle-women, concerning whom so much has been written so recently, may be thought, perhaps, to be less needed now than they were in 1832. But the evil adverted to still exists.

proclaims; because in all countries there are many who are prepared to go with the stream. But let us hope that it is not a true account. There are large numbers of Englishmen, though not, perhaps, of the particular section of society which fell more directly under the observation of that writer, by whom poverty is not despised, unless resulting from indolence or misconduct, and by whom riches are not respected, unless well won or well spent.

Nevertheless it is true enough that riches are too much valued by some classes, whilst they are regarded with jealousy by others; and in the present state of society it were well if all classes could be led to consider justly, and if none would permit themselves to consider enviously or ungently, the manner in which riches are expended, and the general demeanour of the Rich and the Great.

Although the Rich are a small minority of the people, there is no reason why their happiness and enjoyments should not be cared

for; and there is in human nature so much of a disposition to sympathise with happiness and prosperity, that their enjoyment of their wealth will not be unpopular, if it be not seen to be selfish or absurd. But it is desirable both for the sake of the Rich and Great, and for the sake of the sentiments with which the other classes may regard them, that what is expended for enjoyment should really contribute to enjoyment, and also that it should not be more than duly proportioned to what is expended for the benefit of others.

The expenditure of the Rich and Great in matters of mere appearance is often objected to, and it is true that by far the greatest portion of their expenditure is more for show than for any other species of luxury. But this is not to be indiscriminately denounced: and those by whom it should be so dealt with, even though they were the poorest of the poor, would probably be found to be, in their practice, within the condemnation of their own principle. "What need of five-and-twenty, or of ten, or five followers?" said

Goneril. 'What need of one?' added Regan. But the King made answer—

> 'Oh reason not the need; our basest beggars
> Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
> Allow not Nature more than Nature needs,
> Man's life is cheap as beast's!'

The plea of 'supporting the station to which Providence has called us,' is not unmeaning, though it be often much abused; and when it is not abused, the common sense of the people will generally recognise it sufficiently to make matters of show inoffensive. But in order to give validity to the plea, the shows should be such as have attached themselves to the station very gradually, so as to form part of the transmitted usages of society and be harmonised in men's imaginations. New inventions in the way of show, or new extensions of old expenditures in this way, are obnoxious, and should tend to derogate from the respect in which a man is held by his equals, as well as to impair his popularity; because they are evidence that he is not merely sliding into the track which is

prepared for him, but deliberately turning his thoughts to ostentation. A man's expenditure for show, should therefore belong either to the station to which he is born, or to that into which he has gradually passed by the natural influence of increasing riches, superior abilities, or other circumstances which make the shows incidental to the life rather than expressly devised and prepared. Even if the show be no more than proportioned to the wealth, it will not avoid to be obnoxious, if the wealth have been suddenly acquired, and the transition from obscurity be abrupt. 'For I,' says Mr. Landor,

> 'have shunn'd on every side,
> The splash of newly mounted pride.'

And who has not? And in whatever measure show is indulged, let it be apparent that other things are uppermost, and that a man's heart is in his beneficence and in his business.

Amongst the superfluities which add nothing to the enjoyments of the Rich, and

detract from their usefulness, may not superfluous houses be numbered? A man who has many houses, will oftentimes have no home: for the many objects and associations which a man gathers about him, as a shell-fish forms its shell, in a conformity with his manner of being, cannot be so gathered in more places than one. And the perplexity which will beset him from time to time, especially if there are different opinions in his family, in determining to which house to go, will more than counteract the pleasures of change, and his life will need more of forecasting.

And as to usefulness and popularity. Operations for the improvement of his neighbourhood will be interrupted or impaired by changing from house to house, and his own interest in them will be broken and imperfect. If on the other hand he leave any of his houses long unoccupied, the neighbourhood is deprived of the services which are due from a resident man of property. And moreover there is a sense of waste in seeing a house constantly and deliberately left

unoccupied. It is something good, which is neither to be used and enjoyed, nor sold nor lent, nor given—one of the most naked forms of superfluity.

If these views be just, it would follow that rich men should not wantonly embarrass themselves with many houses; and that those to whom they have accrued as unavoidable adjuncts of large estates, should, if possible, let them even for a nominal rent, or establish in them some junior members of their family.

There are objections also to an excessive extent of park, pleasure-ground, and demesne. For this tends to isolate the owner, and to place his neighbours and his duty to his neighbours at a distance from him. The physical element of distance will often make an important difference in a man's relations with his fellow-creatures. An extensive park introduces more or less of this element in the case of all a man's neighbours except his lodge-keepers; and a great extent of contiguous landed property added to this, introduces it in respect of all his neighbours

except his tenants. This is no small evil. The tenantry and dependents of the Rich and Great are not the only persons with whom they should be in relations of good neighbourhood. It is perhaps equally important that they should be in such relations with the clergy and the smaller gentry around them. The attraction of cohesion by which society is to be kept together, will not be brought about by an approximation of its opposite poles, but by an attraction of the nearest to the nearest throughout the social body. The distancing of country neighbours by large parks and estates is the more to be deprecated now, because railroads have recently operated in the same direction, by filling great country houses more than ever with metropolitan society.

In this case again, what is to be done when parks of this excessive extent have descended to the owners, consecrated, perhaps, by hereditary and historical associations?—or when they could not be disparked or contracted in size without injury to the beauty of the coun-

try? Little, perhaps, to abate the specific evil; but much to compensate for it. Such parks, instead of being disparked, may be popularized. Access should never be refused to strangers; certain spaces in them should be assigned for the sports of the neighbouring peasantry; and periodical games and festivities should be celebrated in them for the benefit of the neighbours of all classes. The Aristocrat should ever bear in mind, that his position has something in it of a public and national character, and that aristocratic possessions exist for popular purposes.

That portion of the expenditure of the Rich which is devoted to *luxuries of the table*, may escape the observation of the Poor, and be therefore perhaps less unpopular than it ought to be. But of all excess in luxury, that of the table is the most offensive to the taste of those who would wish to see the higher classes distinguished by refinement at least, if not by simplicity of life. To do the Rich justice, the extent to which this species

of expenditure is carried in these times is to be attributed less to sensuality than to ostentation; and it is to parade expenditure rather than to pamper the appetite, that those never-ending still-beginning dinners are served up, at which a person of a taste unvitiated by custom could hardly look on without a sense of dreariness and disgust. That the offence to good taste is wanton and gratuitous rather than gluttonous, may be inferred from the small quantity of the dainties displayed that is really eaten; and one proof out of many that costliness is chiefly aimed at, is to be found in the practice of providing esculents which are out of season. By a true and unsophisticated taste, what is out of season would be rejected as out of keeping with Nature; and even without reference to any such principle of taste, a strawberry in March is at all events no better than a strawberry in July, though it is about a hundred times dearer; and by our greedy anticipations and our jumbling together of the products of the seasons, we deprive our-

selves of that change and variety which Nature, in her own orderly successions, would provide.

But if the motive for this sort of sumptuousness is display more than gluttony, it has, nevertheless, a most pernicious tendency to promote gluttony; and, indeed, the length of time that people are required to sit at these dinners would be intolerable if there were not much eating and drinking to fill it up. The sensuality is not so gross, certainly, as that of our drunken forefathers; but having regard to the fact that dinners are late as well as long, and that in these times men's brains are taxed as well as their stomachs, the pressure on health is perhaps almost as severe. It has been observed by an eminent physician, that more pressure of that kind results from a life of steady high living than from one of occasional debauch. To long and late dinners, longer and later social entertainments of divers kinds succeed, till the sun rises upon a worn-out world. Everything in the nature of an

amusement is protracted and strained, and there cannot be a greater mistake than this in the economy of enjoyment. The art of carrying off a pleasure is not to sit it out.

Expense in *furniture* is perhaps as innocent as any expense can be which is not meritorious. Yet the internal garnishing and decorations of a house have nothing of the public and patriotic attributes which may be ascribed to the house itself, if it be designed as a work of architectural art, to adorn the land from age to age. The garnishings are for the more exclusive and selfish enjoyment of the owner and of those whom he may admit to his society, and they are fugitive and perishing. Therefore the very large proportionate expenditure of the Rich in these times on luxuries of furniture (designated, perhaps, by the sober and respectable name of 'comforts') is, to say the least, not to be commended. Moreover, many of these luxuries are in reality less conducive to comfort than what is cheap and common;

and there are many more which impair the comfort through the health. The air we breathe in our rooms would be lighter and fresher if there were no such things as carpets, window-curtains, bed-curtains, or valances; and the more full and heavy the draperies of a room, the less light and nimble is the air. And this effect is aggravated if the room be spacious. It is an error to suppose that rooms which are very large and lofty are more airy than others. They may be more airy than very small rooms, but they are less so (and this is well known to the asthmatic) than rooms of moderate dimensions, every corner of which is near the external air. Again, the love of displaying cost and magnificence in furniture is seldom accompanied, even amongst the richest of the rich, by an indifference as to whether it is spoilt or blemished: and yet solicitude on this point militates much against comfort. The sun is often shut out to save the colour of carpets and curtains, at times when Nature's sunshine might well be preferred to the best of

upholstery. In short, there are a hundred ways in which luxury overreaches itself—a hundred in which penance enters into the worship of Mammon. Double windows make our rooms close. Artificial waters poison our parks. And one truth the Rich would do well to keep in mind, for very comfort's sake—that comfort, like health, may be impaired by being too anxiously cared for.

Very different is the view to be taken of a Rich man's in-door expenditure, when he is sparing of mirrors and jars and satin and velvet-pile, but lavish in objects which address themselves to the intellectual and imaginative tastes. In libraries, and works of art, pictures, sculpture, and engravings, a rich house cannot be too rich: and the house of an educated gentleman should no more be without the works of Michael Angelo or Raphael, in one form or another, than without the works of Milton and Shakspeare. And with regard to the galleries of the Rich, if unoccupied as chambers, should they not be always open

to strangers? and if they be so occupied, should they not be open on certain days of every week? In the Palazzo Borghese at Rome, the rooms are not only always open, but they are provided with fires in cold weather, with seats, catalogues, and tubes to look through, so that the stranger feels himself to be a guest, and the guest of a gentleman, and is sensible, not only of the mere liberality of the owner, but of his attentions, courtesy, and good-breeding.

As to the free access to libraries, and the free loan of books, those who lend books no doubt run some risk of losing them. There is nothing which borrowers take so little care to return. Yet the value of a book is only realised in proportion as it is read. A book which is never read is of absolutely no value. Therefore, though many books are said to be lost by lending them, more are lost indeed by leaving them on the shelf. And for the personal and particular loss to the owner, he loses more than he need, if he allows himself to be cheated of his liberality

by the occasional thoughtlessness or thanklessness of those whom he gratifies. That old scholar and gentleman who, after his name written in Latin in the blank page of his books, wrote '*et amicorum ejus*,' had a better possession than that of a library. But the Rich might guard their possession in books by keeping a librarian, who would not cost so much (alas!) as an under butler or a groom of the chambers.

Amongst the most important of the relations in which the Rich and Great stand to their fellow-creatures, are their relations with their servants and their relations with their tradesmen.

Under the former head, there may be, perhaps, little to find fault with on the score of mere manner and outward demeanour. To use servants with harshness, or to be wanting in that species of consideration for them which consists in a certain mildness and amenity of manner, would ruffle and deform that smooth surface of things which it is agreeable to the

taste of people in high life to see around them. Nor do they, perhaps, interfere with the comforts of their dependents by any undue or onerous exactions of service; for their establishments, being for the most part calculated for show, are more numerous than is required for use, and are therefore necessarily underworked, except, perhaps, in the case of some poor drudges at the bottom, who slink up and down the back stairs unseen, and whose comfort, therefore, may not always engage the attention of a family of this class; and even these will not be oppressed with their labours, unless when some impoverished people of fashion may find it necessary to dock the tails of their establishments in order to keep the more prominent portions entire.

Nevertheless the exceptions which may be taken against the life of the Rich and Great, as affecting the class of servants, are of a very grave description. Late hours and habits of dissipation in the heads of a family make it almost impossible, especially in London, to exercise that wholesome house-

hold discipline which is requisite to secure the well-being of a servant. The usages of high life require that the servants of these people should be numerous; their number unavoidably makes them idle; idleness makes them debauched; debauchery renders them often necessitous; the affluence or the prodigality, the indolence or indulgence or indifference of their masters, affords them every facility for being dishonest; and beginning with the more venial kinds of peculation, their conscience has an opportunity of making an easy descent through the various gradations of larceny, till the misdemeanant passes into the felon. In the meantime, the master, taking no blame to himself, nor considering that servants are, to no inconsiderable extent, what their masters make them,—that they are the creatures, at least, of those circumstances which their masters throw around them, and *might* be moulded in the generality of cases, with a fair prospect of successful results, by the will and conduct of the master—passes over, with an indolent and epicurean

censure, the lighter delinquencies which he may happen to detect, laughs perhaps at his own laxity, and, when at length alarmed, discharges the culprit without a character, and relieves himself, at the expense of he knows not whom, by making of a corrupted menial a desperate outcast. Hospitals, workhouses, and prisons, swarm with the broken-down servants of the Rich; and it is but a small proportion of them that live to be old.

If it be said that a man cannot be expected to change his mode of life for the sake of his servants, it must be answered, that a mode of life which hazards the perdition of several of his fellow-creatures, *ought* to be changed, and cannot be persevered in without guilt. But if no such sacrifice were consented to, there remain means by which the evil might be mitigated.

A reduction in the number of servants would be one great means of promoting their well-being, and would involve no real sacrifice of comfort or even of luxury. The way to be well served is to keep few servants;

and the keeping of superfluous servants is one of the many ways in which luxury is self-destroyed. Some little time ago, a lady who kept nine men servants, after several vain attempts to get some coals for her fire, received from her butler the explanation that none of the footmen would bring them up, because 'the odd man' had forgotten to fill the scuttles; the odd man, on such establishments, being the drudge who is hired to do the work of the house. Thus it is that the multiplying of means will often defeat the end; work is seldom well done except by those who have much to do; the idleness of one hour spreads itself rapidly over the whole twenty-four; and servants whose numbers are calculated for show become unavailable for use.

And again, even good servants conduce less to comfort on many occasions than is often supposed. Is it not frequently most for your comfort to serve yourself? How much easier to get yourself something, than to wait doing nothing till it is gotten for you. For impa-

tience is prevented or abated by instrumental activity. 'A watched pot is long in boiling,' says the proverb: but go into the garden, gather some dry sticks, put them under the pot and blow the bellows, and you will not have felt it long. And a rich man, though aware of this, may not be able to help himself; for his household being formed upon the system of everything being done for him, the system becomes too strong for him, and he will not be permitted to *do*, though often compelled to wait.

Every superfluous servant removed, not only removes from the master one superfluous responsibility, but also lightens the difficulties of exercising due discipline over those that remain. It diminishes the risk of disorders and disputes, not merely by subtracting one from the chances; for the one superfluous servant who is the cause of idle time in the establishment, will probably open as many sources of dissipation and discontent as there are members of the household; and many servants, having little

occupation, will invariably employ their leisure in quarrelling with each other:—

> 'Nothing to do was Master Squabble's mother,
> And Much ado his child.'

But in recommending that the numbers of servants should be so reduced as to give them full work, let this be understood to mean full work in working hours only, always taking care that there be fair time allowed for relaxation—time, in the case of those who will so use it, for reading and self-cultivation — and occasional time for the maintenance of those original domestic affections which, in the circumstances in which servants are placed, are so apt to be supplanted.

Another way in which the characters of servants in high life might be improved, would be by seeing their masters a little more scrupulous than some of the more fashionable amongst them are wont to be, in matters of truth and honesty. The adherence to honesty on the part of the masters might be exemplary; whereas their actual measure of honesty would perhaps be indicated with

sufficient indulgence, if they were described (in the qualified language which Hamlet applies to himself) to be 'indifferent honest.' And there is a currency of untruth in daily use amongst fashionable people for purposes of convenience, which proceeds to a much bolder extent than the form of well-understood falsehood by which the middle classes also, not perhaps without some occasional violation of their more tender consciences, excuse themselves from receiving a guest. Fashionable people, moreover, are the most unscrupulous smugglers and buyers of smuggled goods, and have less difficulty than others and less shame, in making various illicit inroads upon the public property and revenue. It is not to be denied that these practices are, in point of fact, a species of lying and cheating; and the latter of them bears a close analogy to the sort of depredation in which the dishonesty of a servant commonly commences. To a servant it must seem quite as venial an offence to trench upon the revenues of a duke, as to the duke

it may seem to defraud the revenues of a kingdom. Such proceedings, if not absolutely to be branded as dishonest, are not at least altogether honourable; they are such as may be more easily excused in a menial than in a gentleman. Nor can it ever be otherwise than of evil example to make truth and honesty matters of degree.

But there is a worse evil in the manners of this country in regard to servants. It is rarely that they are considered in any other light than as mechanical instruments. It unfortunately belongs very little to our national character to feel what the common brotherhood of humanity requires of us in a relation with our fellow-creatures, which, however unequal, is so close as that of master and servant. We are not accustomed to be sensible that it is any part of our duty to enter into their feelings, to understand their dispositions, to acquire their confidence, to cultivate their sympathies and our own upon some common ground which kindness might always discover, and to communicate

with them habitually and unreservedly upon the topics which touch upon that ground. This deficiency would perhaps be more observable in the middle classes than in the highest—who seem generally to treat their inferiors with less reserve—but that in the latter the scale of establishment often removes the greater part of a man's servants from personal communication with him. Whether most prevalent in the fashionable or in the unfashionable classes, it is an evil which, in the growing disunion of the several grades of society, is now more than ever, and for more reasons than one, to be regretted.

The operation of the habits of the Rich and Great upon the class of *tradesmen* (and here, again, reference should be made more especially to those amongst the Rich and Great who form what are called the fashionable circles),—the operation of *their* habits of life upon tradesmen is perhaps a subject of greater moral and political importance than either party is aware of.

People of fashion are for the most part improvident: but even when they are not so in the long run, it seems to be their pride to be wantonly and perversely disorderly in the conduct of their pecuniary transactions. The result of this to themselves is not here the point in question,—although there are few things which in their effects are more certain to pervade the entire moral structure of the mind than habits of order and punctuality, especially in money matters; nor is there anything to which character and honour are more likely to give way than to pecuniary difficulties. But what are the consequences to the tradesmen with whom they deal? In proportion to the delays which the tradesman has had to contend with in procuring payment of the account, is the degree of laxity with which he may expect to be favoured in the examination of the items; especially if he have not omitted the usual means of corrupting the fidelity of servants. The accuracy of a bill of old date is not in general very ascertainable.

and it would seem to be but an ungracious return for the accommodation which the creditor has afforded, if the debtor were to institute a very strict inquisition into the minutiæ of his claims. These considerations concur with the habitual carelessness and indolence of people of fashion, as inducements to them to lead their tradesmen into temptation; and the result is such a demoralisation of the whole class, that it is rare indeed to meet with a tradesman accustomed to be employed by people of fashion, whose accounts, if closely scrutinised, would not betray a want of integrity and fair dealing. The tradesman's want of probity again, will second the customer's want of care; and he will often pertinaciously resist sending in a bill of short date from dishonest motives; well knowing in what cases he can rely upon an ultimate payment in full, of an account 'of which the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.'

Again, people of fashion, though (with occasional coarse exceptions) very *civil-spoken* to

their tradesmen, are accustomed to show in their conduct an utter disregard of what amount of trouble, inconvenience, and vexation of spirit they may occasion, either by irregularity in paying their bills, by requiring incessant attendance, or by a thousand fanciful humours, changes of purpose, and fastidious objections. Possibly, indeed, they are very little aware of the amount of it; so inconsiderate are they of everything which is not made to dance before their eyes, or to appeal to their sensibilities through their senses. Their tradesmen, and the workmen whom their tradesmen employ, are compelled, those by the competition they encounter in their business, these by the necessities of their situation in life, to submit to all the hardships and disquietudes which it is possible for fashionable caprice to impose, without showing any sign of disturbance or discontent; and because there is no outcry made, nor any pantomime exhibited, the fashionable customer may possibly conceive that he dispenses nothing but satisfaction among all with whom

he deals. He rests assured, moreover, that if he gives more trouble and inconvenience than others, *he pays for it;* the charges of the tradesmen of fashionable people being excessively high. Here, however, there is a distinction to be taken. There is no doubt that all the fantastical plagues and preposterous caprices which the spirit of fashion can engender, will be submitted to for money: but he who supposes that the outward submission will be accompanied by no inward feelings of resentment or contempt, either is wholly ignorant of human nature or grossly abuses his better judgment. Between customer and tradesman the balance is adjusted: between man and man there is an account which money will not settle. It is not indeed to be desired that any class of men should be possessed with such a spirit of venal servility as to be really insensible to the folly and oppression which enters into the exactions of fashionable caprice; or that, however compelled to be obsequious in manner, they should altogether lose their perception of

what is due to common sense and to common consideration for others—

> 'And by the body's action teach the mind
> A most inherent baseness.'

If such be the actual result in some instances, then is that consequence still more to be regretted than the other.

Moreover, if the master-tradesmen are willing to sell themselves into this slavery, the consequences to the much more numerous classes of those whom they employ, remains to be taken into the account. These, at least, are not paid for the hardships which ensue to them. Many is the milliner's apprentice whom every London season sends to her grave, because the dresses of fine ladies must be completed with a degree of celerity which nothing but night labour can accomplish. To the question, 'When must it be done?' 'Immediately;' is the readiest answer; though it is an answer which would perhaps be less inconsiderately and indiscriminately given, if it were known how many young creatures have come to a premature death in conse-

quence of it, and how many hearts have been hardened by the oppression which it necessitates. Nor does the evil stop there. The dressmaker's apprentices in a great city have another alternative; and it is quite as much to escape from the intolerable labours which are imposed upon them in the London season as from any sexual frailty, that such multitudes of them adopt a vocation which affords some immediate relief, whilst it ensures a doubly fatal termination of their career. The temptations by which these girls are beset might be deemed all-sufficient, without the compulsion by which they are thus, as it were, driven out into the streets. Upon them, 'the fatal gift of beauty' has been more lavishly bestowed than upon any other class —perhaps not excepting even the aristocracy. They are many of them, probably, the spurious offspring of aristocratical fathers, and inherit beauty for the same reason as the legitimate daughters of aristocrats, because the wealth of these persons enables them to select the most beautiful women either for wives or for

concubines. Nor are they wanting in the grace and simplicity of manner which distinguish the aristocracy; whilst constant manual occupation produces in them more vacuity of mind than even that which dissipation causes in their sisters of the superior class. They are thus possessed of exterior attractions which will at any moment place them in a condition of comparative affluence, and keep them in it so long as those attractions last,—a period beyond which their portion of thought and foresight can scarcely be expected to extend: whilst, on the other hand, they have before them a most bitter and arduous servitude, constant confinement, probably a severe task-mistress (whose mind is harassed and exacerbated by the exigent and thoughtless demands of her employers), and a destruction of health and bloom which the alternative course of life can scarcely make more certain or more speedy. Goethe was well aware how much light he threw upon the seduction of Margaret when he made her let fall a hint of discontent at domestic hardships:—

'Our humble household is but small,
And I, alas! must look to all.
We have no maid, and I may scarce avail
To wake so early and to sleep so late;
And then my mother is in each detail
So accurate.' *

If people of fashion knew at what cost some of their imaginary wants are gratified, it is possible that they might be disposed to forego the gratification: it is possible, also, that they might not. On the one hand they are not wanting in benevolence to the young and beautiful; the juster charge against them being, that their benevolence extends no farther. On the other hand, unless there be a visual perception of the youth and beauty which is to suffer, or in some way a distinct image of it presented, dissipation will not allow them a moment for the feelings which reflection might suggest:

'Than vanity there 's nothing harder hearted;
For thoughtless of all sufferings unseen,
Of all save those which touch upon the round
Of the day's palpable doings, the vain man,

* 'Faust,' Lord F. L. Gower's translation.

And oftener still the volatile woman vain,
Is busiest at heart with restless cares,
Poor pains and paltry joys, that make within
Petty yet turbulent vicissitude.'

If it be against people of fashion mainly that these charges lie, there is another and a heavier charge, which lies against the aristocratic classes generally; and not against them only, but also against no inconsiderable portion of the classes next below them. Many, we fear most, of the mothers of these classes, are in the habit of refusing to suckle their children, even when perfectly able to do so, and of bribing the mothers of the Poor to abandon their duty to their own infants, in order to perform the function thus devolved. A denunciation of this practice was delivered some years ago by an eminent person in the House of Lords, which it were well if he would repeat every session till the country shall be cleansed from so foul an offence. It may be stated, on the highest medical authority, that out of every five infants of wet-nurses thus deserted, four perish. They

are delivered over to women who take no interest in them, to be brought up by hand —a species of nurture peculiarly requiring a mother's care and the aids and appliances of wealth; they die miserably of starvation or neglect, and their death is to be laid at the door, not so much of their own mothers whose poverty consents, as of those who corrupt the maternal instincts of the Poor, and betray them into a cruelty which nothing but ignorance and poverty can palliate. The injunction 'Thou shalt not seethe the kid in its mother's milk,' pointed to a lesser sin than this.

Erasmus held her to be scarcely half a mother who refused to suckle the child that was born to her. He accounted the offence against nature as little less than that of the desertion and exposure of an infant; and he asks her, when the child began to speak, with what face could she hear him call *her* mother, who had neglected to perform for him that most maternal office. In our times the lady's child may not suffer, but the child of

the nurse is much more certainly sacrificed; and thus it is that one unnatural mother makes another that is more unnatural still.*

But besides those who are able, but not willing, to suckle their infants, there are many who profess to be willing, but not able. Do they diligently try? or do they satisfy their consciences with the easy assurances of nurses, attendants, or friends, who are willing to say what they desire to hear? If they *be* unable, does not their inability grow out of a luxurious and unwholesome mode of life, which there is no necessity that they should adopt? and why should the children of the Poor be defrauded of their mothers' milk, to supply deficiencies wilfully

* 'Alioqui cum infans jam fari meditabitur, ac blandâ balbutie te mammam vocabit, quâ fronte hoc audies ab eo, cui mammam negâris, et ad conductitiam mammam relegâris, perinde quasi capræ aut ovi subjecisses? Ubi jam erit fandi potens, quid si te pro matre vocet semi-matrem? Virgam expedies, opinor. Atqui vix semi-mater est, quæ recusat alere, quod peperit . . . . Et in tales fœminas mihi competere Græcorum videtur etymologia, qui μήτηρ dici putant à μὴ τηρεῖν, hoc est, à non servando. Nam prorsus conductitiam nutricem infantulo adhuc à matre tepenti adsciscere, genus est expositionis.'—Erasmi *Colloq. Puerpera.*

created by the indolence and luxury of the Rich? Occasional cases there are, no doubt, in which the inability to suckle is both real and inevitable; and if these cases cannot be met by the employment of such wet-nurses as have already lost their children through natural causes, the wet-nurse should bring her own child with her; and with the sufficient supervision which wealth and maternal vigilance might supply on the part of the rich mother, to guard against maternal partiality on the part of the wet-nurse, a fair and equal share of natural nurture should be secured to the one child and the other; what is wanting to each being made up by the best artificial substitute.

Amongst the incidental evils of the system of wet-nursing, one is that unmarried mothers are most frequently employed, and not unfrequently preferred, for this purpose; and being pampered as well as highly paid, a countenance and encouragement is afforded to vice, and women of tainted character are mixed up with the rich man's household.

On the other hand, if the wet-nurse be married, it is almost invariably (and for physical reasons) made a condition, that during the period for which she is hired she shall not see her husband; and he and her elder children are exposed to the temptations and evils consequent on such a disruption of domestic ties.

The charge of deserting the mother's function in the suckling of infants lies, as has been said, against other classes, as well as against the Rich and Great; but the practice is more universal amongst the Rich and Great; it is politically more important that they should rescue themselves from the reproach of it; their example is of more account; nor is there any person in the realm, however high in station, who, on the very ground of that rank and pre-eminence, should not be the foremost to withstand this crying corruption of the humanities of domestic life.

When such accusations as these are

brought against the wealthier classes, it ought by no means to be forgotten that such things are exceptional, not characteristic; and that there is amongst those classes in these times an activity in charitable works, and a bounty and beneficence, such as probably has never been witnessed in the world before. All classes have been rapidly improving in the last five-and-twenty years. Increase of crime does not prove the contrary, even of the lowest class; it only proves an increased activity of the bad elements as well as of the good; it may show that bad men are worse,—it does not show that fewer men are not bad, or that good men are not far more than proportionately better. But if other classes have improved (the commercial least, perhaps, owing to over-stimulated love of gain), there can be little question that the higher classes have stepped the farthest in advance. Ask our bishops who are the best of the clergy, and will they not answer, the middle-aged and the young, rather than the old or the elderly? Amongst the country

gentlemen not advanced in years, how few are there now who think that they have nothing else to do in life but to make the most of their property and their game. The charity of the Rich is often, indeed, misdirected and mischievous; their liberality sometimes runs ahead of their personal activity as almoners; their judgment still more often halts behind their personal activity. But as long as it is the spirit of love and duty which is active in them, they must be doing good, if not to others, at least to themselves; and in spite of all the errors of injudicious zeal, they will do well upon the whole, and they will be continually learning to do better.

The system of visiting the Poor at their houses has been much found fault with for its obtrusiveness. It is very certain that the somewhat unsocial character and manners of the English, both rich and poor, does put difficulties in the way of it. It is not all sorts of ladies and gentlemen who can carry it out with success, and now that so much is done by organisation and the divi-

sion of labour, it would seem desirable that charitable persons should consider what are their personal aptitudes, and employ themselves accordingly in this or other departments of charitable ministration. Even in that of visiting, there are many varieties. Where there is grievous sickness or other emergency, zeal and care will compensate for dryness of manner. In the more ordinary intercourse of good offices, it is very important to be *pleasant* to the Poor; for services alone will not cultivate their affections; and those who would visit them for every-day purposes of charity, should be by their nature and temperament genial, cordial, and firm.

But charity in detail to the lower orders will afford no sufficient vent for what should be considered the due and adequate bounty of the Rich and Great,—not even though it be distributed through numerous and well-chosen almoners. The Poor of the lower orders are not the only Poor; they are not always the Poor who are most to be

pitied for their poverty; and it devolves upon the Rich and Great to take charge of the many cases of penury in the classes more proximate to their own, which they have the means of duly sifting and appreciating. To them also belong works of munificence,—the providing and endowing of churches, schools, hospitals; and to these let them add, libraries, picture-galleries, public gardens, and play-grounds, for the Poor. In order that the Poor may feel that the Rich are in sympathy with them, the Rich must take a pleasure in their pleasures, as well as pity them in their distress. When the Rich give of their abundance to those who want bread, it may be supposed to be done for very shame, or under the constraint of common humanity. When they take order for the instruction and discipline of the Poor, they are conferring a species of benefit, for which, however essential, they must not expect a return in gratitude or affection. But if they bear in mind that amusement is in truth a necessary of life, that human nature cannot

dispense with it, and that by the nature of men's amusements their moral characters are, in a great measure, determined, they will be led so to deal with the Poor as to make it manifest to them that they like to see them happy, and they will be beloved accordingly.

But if the amusements of men have so much to do in forming them, it may be well to consider what are the amusements of the Rich and Great themselves. Into these it will be found that the ambitious activity of the times has made its way. It is no longer enough for the Rich and Great to be *passively* entertained; to look on and admire does not content them; and hence the theatre has fallen out of favour. They must be where they are themselves in part performers, or they must find their amusement in the prosecution of some object and end. Society, therefore, becomes their theatre; and to the not inconsiderable number of them who constitute what are called the 'fashionable

circles,' a particular position and reputation in society becomes an object, in the pursuit of which they find their amusement.

The effect of this upon the character is not favourable. It used to be supposed that whatsoever of effort and uneasy pretension might prevail elsewhere, in the highest walk of society, amongst those whose born rank and worldly consideration was unquestionable, where nothing further was to be attained and everything possessed was secure, the charm of confidence and quiescence would be found at last. But when into this circle, as into others, the pursuit of a personal object is introduced, into this, as into others, cares and solicitudes will accompany it; and the object of success in a social career has little in it that is elevating, or can help much to modify the selfishness of human nature. Into circles, therefore, where social reputation is aimed at, rather than merely the giving and receiving of pleasure, the feelings connected with the lower kinds of rivalry and competition must be expected to intrude, disturbing

in some more or less degree the ease and grace of aristocratic life. And accordingly fashionable society, whatever may be its charms and brilliancy, when compared with other aristocratic society is said to be characterised by some inferiority of tone, even in its higher walks; and in its lower by a tone which, without any desire to use hard words, can hardly be called anything else than vulgar.

It may, no doubt, be said for these circles that talents are appreciated in them; and if talents were the one thing needful in this world, on that they might take their stand. But it is not by the possession and cultivation of talents, but by the best use and direction of them, that the aristocracy of this country is to be sustained in public estimation. Knowledge and ability which are merely made subservient to conversational effects, will do nothing for the aristocracy. We may well allow that in the casual intercourse of life, or as common acquaintances, people of fashion, in spite of occasional inferiorities and vulgarities, are the most agree-

able people that are to be met with. How should it be otherwise? That persons who have spent their lives in cultivating the arts of society should have acquired no peculiar dexterity in the exercise of them, would be as strange as that one who had spent his life as a hackney coachman, should not know his way through the streets. Those who have been trained in the habits of society from their childhood, will generally be free from timidity, which is the most ordinary source of affectation. By those who are free from timidity, unaffected, and possessed of an average share of intelligence, address in conversation is easily to be attained with much less practice than the habits of fashionable life afford. It is an art which, like that of the singer, the dancer, and the actor, is almost sure to be acquired, up to a certain mark, by practising with those who understand it. The *élite* of such society, therefore, will probably be found to be more adroit, vivacious, and versatile in their talk than others, more prompt and nimble in their wit, and more graceful and

perfect in the performance of the many little feats of agility in conversation which come easily to those who have been used to consider language rather as a toy than as an instrument. At the same time, even if entertainment were the only thing to be sought, a man of sense who should seek it in this style of conversation, would probably fall upon much that would be offensive to his taste, and not a little to which he would refuse the name of good breeding. He would find, perhaps, that sharpness and repartee were in general aimed at more than enough; and that some persons possessed of a small sort of talent and but meagerly provided with subject-matter of discourse, cultivate habitually a spirit of sarcasm and disparagement to which they do not very well understand how to give a proper direction. Quickness has justly been observed by Mr. Landor to be amongst the least of the mind's properties: 'I would persuade you,' says that very brilliant and remarkable writer, 'that banter, pun, and quibble, are the properties

of light men and shallow capacities; that genuine humour and true wit require a sound and capacious mind, which is always a grave one.' *

Conversation is, in truth, an exercise very dangerous to the understanding when practised in any large measure as an art or an amusement. To be ready to speak before he has time to think, to say something apt and specious,—something which he may very well be *supposed* to think when he has nothing to say that he really does think,—to say what is consistent with what he has said before, to touch topics lightly and let them go,—these are the arts of a conversationist: of which perhaps the last is the worst, because it panders to all the others. Nothing is searched out by conversation of this kind,—nothing is heartily believed, whether by those who say it or by those who hear it. It may be easy, graceful, clever, and sparkling, and bits of knowledge

* Landor's 'Imaginary Conversations,' 1st Series, Vol. 2, p. 404, 2nd edition.

may be plentifully tossed to and fro in it; but it will be vain and unprofitable: it may cultivate a certain micacious, sandy surface of the mind, but all that lies below will be unmoved and unsunned. To say that it is vain and unprofitable is, indeed, to say too little; for the habit of thinking with a view to conversational effects, will inevitably corrupt the understanding, which will never again be sound or sincere.

The dealings of these people with literature and art, like their dealings with society, have some tincture of personal ambition. Books are not read, pictures seen, or music listened to, merely for the delight to be found in them, or the private improvement of the mind. The Rich and Great make efforts of their own in these lines, and become candidates for public applause. This is by no means to be deprecated when the efforts made are such as to command respect as well as notice and attention. Let the works produced be admirable for their genius, or respectable for the labour and perseverance

bestowed upon them, or the knowledge and capacity evinced by them, and nothing can be more commendable in the Rich and Great than to produce them, nothing more calculated to strengthen the hold of these classes upon the classes below. But the opposite consequence follows when the Rich and Great are paraded and panegyrised by a particular department of the periodical press as the authors of light and frivolous tales; or when they are found exhibiting their indifferent accomplishments in collections of ephemeral verses, or in engravings from their drawings, not unfrequently sold at bazaars on those pretexts of charity which stand so much in need of a charitable construction. Imperfect efforts in literature and art make a refined and innocent amusement for the Rich and Great, and as far as they go are cultivating: but publication needs to be vindicated on other grounds.

But let amusements be as innocent as they may, and let society be as free as it may from ambition and envy, still, if the life be

a life of society and a life of amusement, instead of a life of serious avocations diversified by amusement and society, it will hardly either attain to happiness or inspire respect. And the more it is attempted to make society a pure concentration of charms and delights, the more flat will be the failure. Let us resolve that our society shall consist of none but the gay, the brilliant, and the beautiful,—that is, that we will exclude from it all attentions towards the aged, all forbearance towards the dull, all kindness towards the ungraceful and unattractive,—and we shall find that when our social duties and our social enjoyments have been thus sedulously set apart, we have let down a sieve into the well instead of a bucket. What is meant to be an unmixed pleasure will not long be available as a pleasure at all. 'On n'aime guère d'être empoisonné même avec esprit de rose.' Nor is it in our nature to be durably very well satisfied with an end which does not come to us in the disguise either of a means or of a duty. Duty being pro-

scribed, the want of an aim will be felt in the midst of all the enjoyments that the choicest society can afford, and what was entered upon as an innocent amusement, will lose, in no long time, first, its power to amuse, and next, its innocence. The want of an object will be supplied, either by aiming at the advancement of this person or the depreciation of that—in which case the pursuit of social pleasure will degenerate into the indulgence of a vulgar pride and envy—or (which is worse and more likely), by merging the social pursuit in the vortex of some individual passion.

It is upon the blank weariness of an objectless life that these amorous seizures are most apt to supervene; and the seat which pleasure has usurped from duty will be easily abdicated in favour of passion and guilt. Such is the ancient and modern history of what is called a life of pleasure, with some variations of the particulars from century to century, but with little difference in the result. When Berkeley cast up, under dis-

tinct articles of credit and debt, the account of pleasure and pain of a fine lady and a fashionable gentleman of the last century, he mentioned some items which may now be omitted,—(drinking and quarrelling are not now the vices of men of fashion, nor amongst the women is gaming so prevalent as it once was),—but he also supposed the omission of some which are now to be placed in the head and front of the balance sheet:—

'We will set down,' he says, 'in the life of your fine lady, rich clothes, dice, cordials, scandal, late hours, against vapours, distaste, remorse, losses at play, and the terrible distress of ill-spent age increasing every day: *Suppose no cruel accident of jealousy—no madness or infamy of love;* yet at the foot of the account you shall find that empty, giddy, gaudy, fluttering thing, not half so happy as a butterfly or a grasshopper on a summer's day. And for a rake, or man of pleasure, the reckoning will be much the same, if you place listlessness, ignorance, rottenness, loathing, craving, quarrelling, and such qualities or accomplishments over-against his little circle of fleeting amusements.'*

Assuredly, in this day and generation, the particulars which Berkeley was willing to pretermit, are no longer to be regarded as

* Alciphron, Dial. 2.

doubtful elements in the calculation. Laxity in respect of the cardinal female virtue is unquestionably the cardinal sin of fashionable society: and what renders it most offensive is, that it is a *discriminating* laxity. It is impossible to deny that the frailties of persons who, by means of their wealth, can surround themselves with a surpassing degree of splendour, meet with an extraordinary quantum of indulgence. Absolutions and dispensations of a certain kind are bought and sold; and of two women taken in adultery, the one of whom riots in a profusion of riches and is lavish of costly entertainments, whilst the other enjoys no more than an ordinary share of affluence, fashionable infallibility will issue to the one its indult, and to the other its anathema. Many who contemplate at a safe distance the ways of the great world, will feel the injustice and baseness of the *distinction*, even more sensibly than the immorality, pernicious though it be, of the looser proceeding. An indiscriminate indulgence might pass for an

amiable weakness or an excess of charity. But if it be through a charitable spirit that the great and sumptuous sinners are admitted into society, what shall we call that spirit by which the more obscure or indigent are expelled? Society acts either in the one case with the cruelty of a tyrant, or in the other with the vileness of a parasite. It is true, that if the paramount interests of morality did not require that the rule of expulsion should be universal, there are some unfortunate and penitent creatures who might be very fit objects for a charitable exception: but these are precisely they who would have no desire to profit by it: on them society has no longer any boon to bestow; for they know that their place is in retirement, and that it is there they must seek their consolation and set up their rest. It is not by the humble, the pardonable, and the contrite, that admittance or restoration to society is sought, after one of these forfeitures; it is only by the callous, the daring, and obtrusive—and it is they who succeed.

Such are the unfavourable features of society amongst the Rich and Great; and if they pervaded aristocratic life at large, instead of being, as they are, incidental merely to this set or that circle, it would not be easy for the aristocracy to hold their ground in the country. The sets and circles in question are, no doubt, from political and domestic connection, necessarily mixed up with better aristocratic society; and as the show and pretension which belongs to them obtrudes them more upon the world, they bring upon that better aristocratic society a measure of disgrace which is far beyond its deserts. For let us clear away this clever, showy, frivolous outside of the aristocracy, and there will be found beneath it a substance as different from what might be expected as the old oak which is sometimes discovered beneath a coat of whitewash. And not only do the more favourable features prevail with the larger portion of the aristocracy, but they prevail most with the younger portion, and

are therefore more full of hope and promise. The circle of the idle and the dissolute is a narrowing circle. The circle of the grave and religious, the active and instructed, is a widening circle. That one improvement which is the source of all others,—improvement in education,—is reaching the higher classes at last, though by slow degrees and with difficulty, for pedantic prejudice is of all prejudice the most obstinate. The improvement at present tends perhaps more to ambition and attainment than to the elevation of the mind; but more than one example has shown that this is not an inevitable inferiority of schools and colleges; and a higher order of schoolmasters will, in time, effect by personal influence what mere tuition is utterly inadequate to accomplish.

The better training of our aristocratic youth at schools and colleges is followed by better conditions of life in its outset and progress. It is expected of almost every young man that he should embark in some career, if not

professional, then political; and a political career, even to those who do not hold office, is a much more serious thing than it used to be. The days of dilettante politicians are well nigh past. A member of parliament can no longer subsist upon a stock of great principles and an occasional fine speech. Public business consists now of dry detail in enormous masses; and he who is called upon to deal with it, is constrained to take upon himself some moderate share at least, of the infinite drudgery by which the masses are broken down. This is a wholesome element in the lives of our aristocratic youth; and if they shall aspire to a prominent position in political life, they must undergo an amount of labour in itself enough to entitle to respect the man who, not being in want of bread, shall submit to it from an impulse of no unworthy ambition.

Besides the discipline of hard labour, there is another to which a man in a prominent public station must submit himself, — the

discipline of obloquy and public reproach. There is no discipline by which strength is more tried, none by which it is more cultivated and confirmed if the trial be borne with temper, fortitude, and self-reliance, and with a disregard of all ends which are not public as well as personal. It is in the strength of silence that such trials are often best encountered: for silence has a marvellous force and efficacy in rebutting slanders; being felt to be what it almost always is, the attribute of a clear conscience and of self-respect. Above all, let persons in a high station beware of defending themselves in the press, or responding to challenges there made. They will lose more in pleading to that jurisdiction, than they could possibly gain by a favourable issue, even if a favourable issue were to be expected. But there is no such thing as a favourable issue in such an encounter. A controversy *with* the press *in* the press, is the controversy of a fly with a spider.

The good repute of the Rich and Great, as of others, is endangered much more by not attending to just reproaches, than by disregarding those which are unjust. Not, therefore, by descending into the arena and hustling those by whom they are hustled—not by writing and declaiming when babblers and scribblers assail them, let the aristocracy approve themselves—not by jealous assertions or angry appeals, but by silence and works. Let those of them who regard themselves as elected and ordained to act from a vantage-ground for the good of their country and their kind, demean themselves accordingly, using those transmitted weapons which are tempered by time, though the handling of them be by circumstance,—or, far better, those which make no account of time, but are sent with their perennial aptitudes direct from the armoury above,—the breast-plate of righteousness, the sword of the Spirit, and the shield of faith. By charity, by munificence, by laborious usefulness, by a studious and

not merely Epicurean cultivation of literature and the arts, by that dignity which sees not itself, by a maintenance of their Order as a national institution, for patriotic purposes, not for individual aggrandisement; and, lastly, by standing apart, both in social life and in political, from that portion of their Order, however distinguished by rank or wealth or useless and pernicious talents, whose follies or vices or selfishness or pride, tend to bring the whole into contempt;—by holding on in this high and constant course, the aristocracy of this intellectual country, which was once, and after a sleepy century is now again, a pre-eminently intellectual aristocracy, will fulfil its appointed purposes, giving a support, not to be dispensed with, to that social fabric of which it may well be accounted the key-stone; and sustaining, peradventure, for so long as the good of mankind may require it to be sustained, that strength by which England is enabled at this instant time to look out from the shelter which the

winds and waves of a thousand years have scooped out for her, and see in safety the disastrous wrecks which are strewn about on every side, through the pride of aristocracies in times past and the present madness of the nations.

THE END.

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